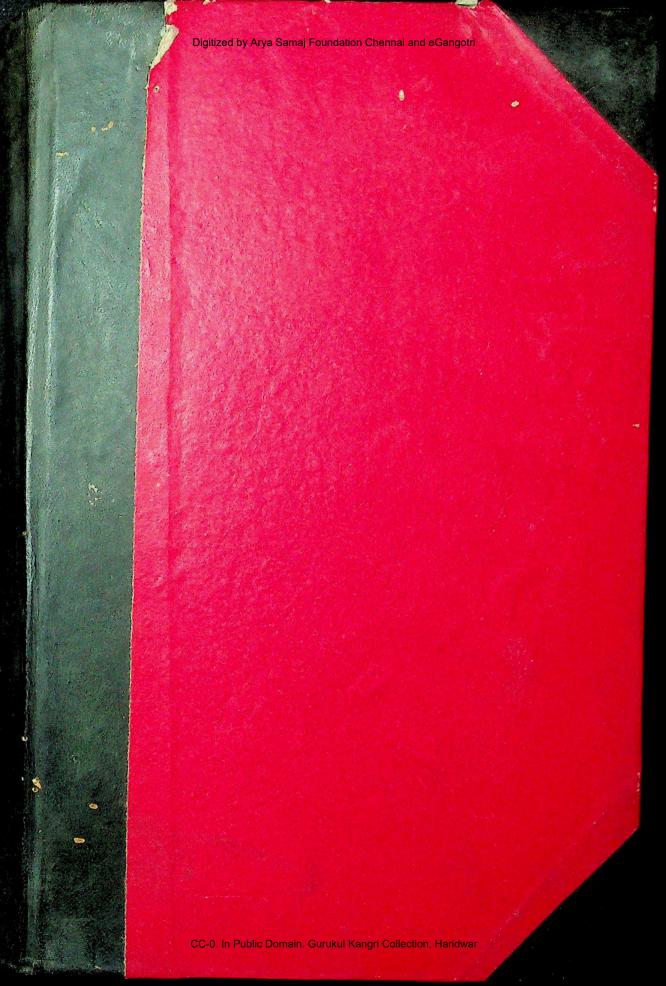
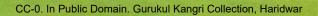
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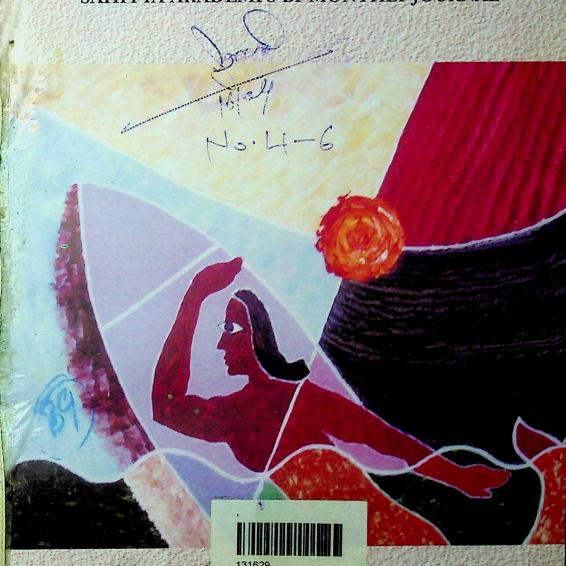
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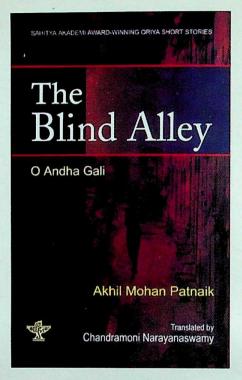
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The highlight of this issue is young Oriya poetry. Durga Prasad Panda, himself a practising poet in his mid-thirties, has helped us curate this section containing 20 poems by 19 poets most of whom are in their late twenties. While introducing this section, Durga Prasad claims that 1980 onwards Oriya poetry has come out of its narcissistic mould of self-aggrandisement and started portraying the realities around them. One agrees with him that the social content of Oriya poetry today is quite strong; several of the poems we carry reflect the anguish and disillusionment of the young poets in the face of globalisation taking over even village vistas and the simple joys of rusticity replaced by the greed and avarice of the market place. Many of them mourn the irrevocable loss of innocence. At the same time, such poems serve as a wake-up call, urging sensitive minds to be vigilant.

To supplement the poetry section, we also club some seven short stories by Oriya writers, not all necessarily young. I would like to draw the reader's attention to a quaint story boldly entitled "M.K. Gandhi" by Bhupen Mohapatra. Behind the façade of an apparently hilarious situation in which a young Oriya bureaucrat in charge of the Public Grievance Cell suddenly finds himself face to face with Gandhi who had come to lodge a complaint, the story exposes the absurdity of our present socio-political situation with tolerant humour and mild irony.

Progressive Writers' Movement was a landmark in the history of Indian literature. Anti-imperialistic and Left-oriented, these writers sought to inspire people through their writings advocating equality and attacking social injustice and backwardness. This Movement was a spectrum of different shades of political and literary opinions with Prem Chand, a confirmed believer in Gandhism at one end, and Sajjad Zaheer, a confirmed Marxist, at the other. In between them were various other shades including non-conformists, but every one of them interested in the freedom of the country, removal of social injustice and the glory of literature. Ali Sardar Jafri has described in one of his writings how, once in Mumbai, Faiz Ahmed Faiz was amazed to see in the house of a young progressive poet and journalist a picture of Lenin side by side with an image of Christ on the cross. According to *The Dawn* newspaper, "Progressive Writing in Urdu literature was the strongest movement after Sir Syed's education movement. The

progressives contributed to Urdu literature some of the finest pieces of fiction and poetry. Undoubtedly, they were the trend-setters for the coming generations of writers, and their role cannot be denigrated or denied." In an article we publish in this issue Javed Akhtar, one of India's finest lyricists, traces the course of the Progressive Movement in Urdu literature, explodes some of the myths associated with it, removes some misunderstandings and finally establishes the unity of art and beauty.

The other article in this issue addresses the challenges involved in literary translations, and how the modern theories of translation are trying to grapple with these challenges. At the beginning of the essay, Keya Majumdar lays out her purpose as "primarily to trace the translational theories with regard to post-modern times." In her arguments, she draws our attention to some analogous relationships between hermeneutical constructions and translatory 'experiences' and then goes ahead to demonstrate how, in the modern context, translation and translational theory transverse the territories of nation, person, culture, in more ways than one, to reach and enrich the global cultural per-

spective.

'This is an age of 'beautiful' books. I just came across one: Cathal O Searcaigh's Kathmandu Poems. Wonderfully produced, this is a bilingual volume with original poems in English followed by their Nepali translation by Yuyutsu R.D. Sharma, himself a renowned poet, who has also written a perceptive Introduction to the book. Cathal O Searcaigh has been described by The Irish Times as "one of Ireland's finest working poets." He has received numerous honours including the prestigious Sean O Riardain Award and the The Irish Times Literary Award for his unique contribution to Irish Language and Literature. Literary influences on the young O Searcaigh are many but the American beat poets, sixties rock music, and the Japanese haiku poets are among the strongest. O Searcaigh lives in Donegal, Ireland but spends five months a year in Kathmandu with his adopted son Prem Timalsina and his family. It is with a chance meeting in a book store at Kathmandu that the liaison between O Searcaigh and Yuyutsu R.D. Sharma began. In the course of the conversation in that bookstore, Yuyutsu mentioned their monthly poetry readings, to one of which O Searcaigh paid a casual visit. He got enticed, visited again, became a regular and a camaraderie started developing. It blossomed into an alliance that led to the present volume. Let me conclude by quoting a few lines from O Searcaigh's "Little is all I need":

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But as a bird carries drops of water in its feathers Or as the wind carries grains of salt from the shore,

Come to me always with a tiny spark, a tear.
A little is all I need if it comes from your heart.

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Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee Editor

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Contemporary Oriya Poetry: Breaking New Grounds

Durga Prasad Panda

"Poets are like olives, yielding their essential best in times of oppression"

For any genre of literature, once in a while it becomes imperative to reassess its ontological and literary assumptions over a period of time in order to rearrange the aesthetic boundaries that give the genre its shape, identity and gloss. It would, indeed, be a cliché to say that there has been notable changes in the realm of contemporary Oriya poetry over the past two decades. Such shifts in literary trends, and there are many, need to be analysed and showcased properly to put them in the right perspective.

The eighties of the last century marked a watershed decade for modern Oriya poetry. It was around that time that Modern Oriya poetry had started taking significant and perceptible turns paving the way for certain trends which were clearly visible. It was also around the same time that the word 'post modernism' was doing the rounds in academic corridors and campus cafes. The winds of sweeping change were blowing fast across the literary circles causing a new radical awakening among the writers. As a result, the overall focus of Oriya poetry shifted from a self-engrossing, inword and highly individualistic view to adopt a much broader and diversified worldview and the poets started to look beyond the 'self' to accommodate new realities encompassing a wider poetic vision. From being highly personalized voices, Oriya poetry started becoming more and more 'universal' in its appeal and has learnt to see life in its totality. Such expansion of mental horizon led to Oriya poets becoming 'world citizens' while

retaining their ideological moorings in the 'local'.

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sion hile Oriya poetic expression took a virtual turnaround and has truly evolved in the sense that poets of today are responding to the socio-political realities in a much better way than their earlier counterparts. Contemporary Oriya poets take an abiding interest in social causes like starvation, displacement, gender inequality, caste oppression and all sorts of human suffering—not as slogan-shouting forerunners of some political movement but as a highly sensitive lot keen on doing their bit by giving voice to the voiceless and strength to the weak as a mark of solidarity.

While poetry of the seventies mostly remained and thrived on being 'critic's choice' rather then 'people's voice', contemporary Oriya poetry revels in breaking free from the clutches of needless ornamentation of words, hackneyed themes like death, alienation, self-obsessiveness, borrowed Eliotean images of gloom and devastation, fashionable and romanticised grief, obscurity, verbosity, intellectualism and all that which made poetry of the seventies an elitist and urban pastime. It is heartening to note that new Oriya poetry has finally moved from the cosy interior of the drawing rooms to the wide open road, breathing the air of freedom and getting more visible than ever. Oriya poetry today stands firmly rooted in its own soil. A significant body of contemporary Oriya poetry could, therefore, be construed as a sincere attempt to know its own people, surroundings and roots in an intimate way.

Though the use of 'myth' as a powerful vehicle of poetic expression helped modern Oriya poetry find a reader's base by striking up an emotional link with the common masses, but excessive pre-occupation with 'myth', had actually blocked its forward movement. Even at one point of time it seemed as though modern Oriya poetry could not stand erect without the 'crutch' of myth. So, quite apparently, the biggest failure of the poetry of the seventies was its inability to make 'contemporaneity' an integral part of its poetic vision. As Jayanta Mahapatra, the celebrated Indian-English poet, observes:

...this highly praised so-called successful poetry, has completely sidelined social and political issues, those that matter to the ordinary individual. The poetry has been one of 'escape' evolving around the same old myths poets were taking about a hundred years ago.

(Indian Literature, March-April 2001, P-31)

Durga Prasad Panda / 9

In sharp contrast, today's young Oriya poet has guts to take a firm stand on any burning issue and looks very much like a social activist who could be overtly vocal and extremely critical of the establishment unlike his predecessors who were too much concerned about the 'political correctness' of their writings. The radicalism, artistic range, articulation of dissent and the robust vigour exhibited by the present-day Oriya poets lend them a distinct presence in the pan-Indian literary arena.

Notwithstanding the significant strides made by modern Oriya poetry, there exists some grey areas too. One tends to agree with

Sumanyu Satpathy, a scholar critic, when he says:

...the problem with contemporary poetry (Oriya) is, not so much that it does not have a readership, nor that there is a marked absence of quality. Rather it is the near-total absence of insightful Oriya poetry criticism.

(Indian Literature, March-April 2001, P-29)

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When poetry of the seventies suffered heavily from an overdose of existential angst, obscurity, myth, difficult and personal symbols, and too much of scholarship, it got along well with the academic-critics but gradually slipped away and alienated itself from the common readers. And now when contemporary Oriya poetry has moved towards 'transparency' and started becoming more reader-friendly, some senior critics denounced the trend on the ground that poetry was getting 'oversimplified' (whatever that means!) and was not adding much to the richness of the language.

The question is why shouldn't the canons of poetry be redefined from time to time to incorporate the dynamic shifts in the literary tastes, ideas and theories? Our so-called critics have not just failed to respond to this vital question they rather created a poor taste of critical appreciation by resorting to blatant sycophancy of the literary Moghuls of our time. Though contemporary Oriya poetry does not need a certificate of excellence from these critics, yet much of what ails literature in general and poetry in particular could be ascribed to a general deterioration in fair and critical appraisal—leading us to an absurd situation of 'bad poetry' driving 'good poetry' out of circulation.

The overall tone of contemporary Oriya poetry is a total rejection of all notions of 'modernity' which was borrowed largely from the West. For the new poets of Orissa no literary canon could

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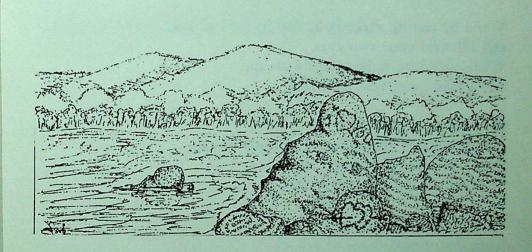
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total gely ould be treated as fixed or sacred. For them 'modernity' in poetry has to be synonymous with 'liberation'—that includes liberation from the shackles of the past, to break away from established literary conventions, to dismantle pious traditions held sacred so far—to explore new frontiers of aesthetic sensibility. The rigour with which the new crop of Oriya poets are forging ahead and expressing themselves is to be taken note of seriously—be it people's movements in Kashipur, hunger in Kalahandi, conflicts of caste and class, tribal identity, sexuality, gender, globalization; the thrust is to embrace the whole gamut of issues that concern life at large.

Barring just a few, almost all poets presented here are young and fresh, mostly in their late twenties or early thirties, with barely a collection or two or none at all, trying with all their sincerity to portray the agony and frustrations of our times, love and loss, disillusionment, dreams and aspirations, grim realities, raw sensuality, dissent and protest in a voice which is vibrant, assertive and straight from the heart. Their words carry the weight of their profound imagination and involvement with life as the poetry in the following pages will certainly speak for themselves.



POETRY

Ashutosh Parida

Thief

Now, no longer my mother need to shut herself inside the dark room and weep.

I need no longer worry about sitting on a donkey with my entire face blackened.

Now I could move about freely in the broad daylight walking tall and straight.

You'd be staring vacantly at the sky and I'll steal your two eyes.
While you'd be walking lazily around I will take away your two feet.

Before you could realise
I could unlatch the bone out of your rib-cage.
I can take away the stone slabs
from within the giant structures.

I could easily steal words from the printed pages of a book, milk from the mother's breast, and faith from your heart's depth. in
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With the magical sleight of my hands I could steal anything I desire without causing even a scratch mark in anyone's body.

The walls and the boundaries intact, guards standing erect upon their toes, iron safe sealed tight with wax and my beloved country lying decrepit like the empty shell of a dead crab.

And from a distance I'll be listening to all the cries of anguish and watch gleefully the traps being laid-out to catch me red-handed

The ones in search of me would be looking exactly like myself.

A safe distance away
I'd remain busy in carving out
new ways of my escape,
without the slightest sign of remorse or anxiety,
my guilt laughing its heart out.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

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Abhay Narayan Nayak

Anything Can Happen

Anything can happen here in this God-forsaken crust of land.

The lifeless body of an elected president could be seen hanging from the lamp-post.

A minister could be seen with all smiles coming out of the courtroom absolved of fraud, deceit and treachery.

The parched rainless soil of Kalahandi could burn into ashes under some cosmic curse.

Somebody digging into the body of a newspaper could be utterly disappointed at not finding even the decayed skeleton of our cherished dreams.

Instead, some jackals could be seen biting into the stinking carcass of our democracy.

The prices of essential commodities could always get out of control. Sweet potato, tendu leaf, neem could be nationalised depriving the tribals

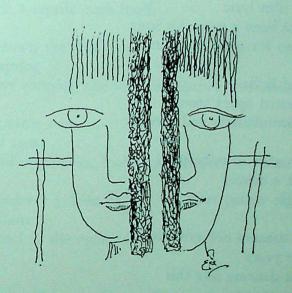
of their traditional rights. Rice-wine could be declared as national drink.

Five star hotels could masquerade as harems to quench white skin's thirst for brown flesh.

The multinationals could manufacture anything from potato chips to sanitary napkins. Hospitals and orphanages could be handed over to bloodsuckers.

Even mother's breast could be auctioned off to some foreign bidders along with factories, forests and mines. Anything can happen here.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda



Basudev Sunani

Golden Jubilee of India's Independence

Gandhiji—
just a framed picture
to adorn the drawing room walls.

Nehru, Subhas, Patel are merely dead words after whom some of the city roads could be named.

Freedom struggle a cheap Hindi film lyric which had once been a mega hit song and remained so for quite sometime.

Free citizens of India—
a well orchestrated opera troupe
consisting of drumbeaters and dancers;

Where the arrogant drumbeaters could kick out a dancer even for a single wrong step.

Strangely, the dancers not even aware, for how many years they have been dancing like this to their bizarre tunes.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

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Bipin Nayak

The Road

The road which leads to nowhere in particular—where actually does it reach in the end?

Sometimes, a road stretches out even from one's within and comes back again.

One day, a crop of grass sprouts beside the road around which a reptile curls itself.

Somewhere down the road a garrulous spring drifts aimlessly carrying the voice of history and ashes.

One day the same road obliterates all signs of arrivals and departures, footprints of man.

May be, someday a golden deer could come there to roam around in the open.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

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Biraja Bal

Bonsai

Over there, it is just a miniature banyan tree planted in a cement pot,

whose pale leaves shudder in the wind and the hungry, dangling boughs beat their crazy heads upon the dusty floor of the terrace.

When the cloudless sky burns like a blaze of fire, the gardener keeps pouring water into the flower pot in a supreme gesture of pity.

Time and again he cuts the tree's future down to a small size, prunes its present just to a bare minimum with the gentle violence of scissors.

Who'll tell the gardener that the cement pot is a different world altogether and despite air and water the tree is gasping for breath which should be allowed to flourish elsewhere on the earth?

By this time the stunted banyan tree could have grown into a giant tree and like able offspring, its cascading boughs should have cracked open the earth and pierced into it; children playing and swinging in other boughs in gay abandon.

Why can't the banyan tree lovingly offer shelter to any wayfarer, or call the birds to perch on its branches to cackle in their sweet melodious voice?

One day I told the banyan tree that the whole sky stretching from one horizon to another is all yours, this brown-crusted earth too belongs to you, you've the strength to crack open the hardest of rocks; can't you break a mere cement pot!

That very night a loud bang was heard.

Perhaps, the banyan tree broke the cement pot into pieces.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

Durga Prasad Panda

Hand

Like a hungry serpent this hand slithers around the dense wilderness of your body looking for prey.

Could this hand be mine?

After all, it is hard to believe that this slender, pink-skinned, petal-soft hand that has never hurt a fly could turn so beastly in the dark!

Like the cat's burning eyes, perhaps, the secret truths of the body are revealed only in the darkness.

Translated from Oriya by the Poet

A Kind of Fear

Which fear lurks from within the dense dark leaves like the truant face of death? Wh wal like

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Which fear walks alongside the indulgent body like a shadow?

Which fear stares from across the assassin's blood-red eyes?

Today I met my fear in the crystal mirror of water.

He resembled me.

Is fear nothing but one's own savage darkness?

Translated from Oriya by the Poet Central Library

Gurukul Kangri University

Hardwar-249404 (U.A.)



Hemanta Dalpati

The Moon

The moon that floats up and trembles in the crystal clear waters of my well does not belong to me.

Yet my sincere efforts
to lift it up onto my canvas
goes on ceaselessly—
night after night but in vain;
page after page gets torn and blown into bits.

Perhaps, the moon belongs to the well alone, and not me. I can't possibly own it I can't caress it. I can't curse it either. I can't drain it away. I can't lift it up in my hands.

It is so brittle that it breaks into pieces easily even when a light breeze blows from the south or if someone claps his hand or when a frog suddenly jumps on its prey.

Perhaps the moon is just a figment of my fertile imagination I have been nurturing with great care. Other that turn noth

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Otherwise, how could it be that all I have poured into my canvass turn slowly into nothing but darkness!

Now I wish I could bury the well with the moon inside it and liberate myself.



Kumar Srikant

The Sea

Sea!
Why do you throw yourself
on the grey hardness of the shoreline
knowing fully well
that the rocks are an arrogant lot
devoid of any streak of compassion.

Sea!
Why do you try to touch the horizon who takes pride in its very elusiveness; like the proverbial blue lotus it goes further away, or perhaps like a mirage you chase in vain.

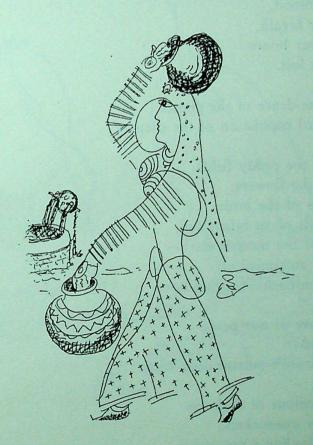
Sea!
Why do you anoint yourself
with the colour of the vast blue sky
fully aware that the sky is a heartless creature?
Has the sky ever come down
to you even for a friendly gossip?

Sea!
Why do you cry your heart out,
over your endless agonies?
Here people have hearts made of stone,
your crying in the wilderness of humanity
will go unheeded.

Tra

Sing

Seal Just wri who Giv Sea!
Just look at the poet who is busy writing poetry for you—
who has truly understood your feelings.
Give your heart to him.
Sing for him the song of life and see him dissolving in your intimacy.



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Lenin Kumar

Quiet Conspiracies

The citadel of the quiet morning has been shattered by the wolf's wild cries.

Fire in our blood, storm in our breath, strength in our bones all have been lost.

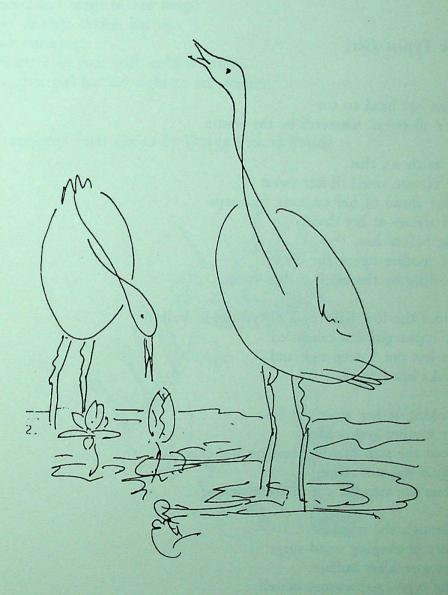
Now, it is the dance of the ghosts and the absurd copulation of the corpses.

The scent of the paddy fields, fragrance of the flowers, delicate wings of the birds, faltering words of an infant sun, birth pangs of the mother earth—all have been auctioned off except the ramshackle begging bowl.

The white dove of our peace is now secured under the vulture's outstretched wings

Wearing the colour of darkness in their empty eye-sockets, skeletons are leading a procession of beggars from one market to another; while the forked tongue of our words keep hatching sinister plots in utter silence.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda



Mamatamayee Choudhury

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The Typist Girl

From her head to toe she's all sweat, whatever be the season.

So much so, that
the bizarre smell of her sweat
walks ahead of her on long footsteps
and arrives at her door
long before her.
Her mother opens the door
knowing by the smell of her sweat.

Under the low light of a dirty, dim-lit bulb the typist girl sits exhausted. She lets out a deep sigh and cracks her fingers.

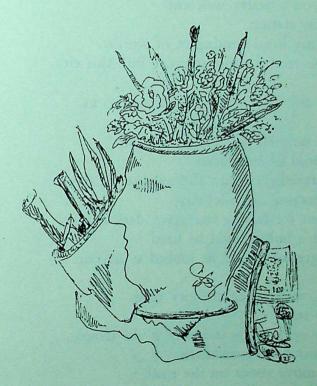
Looking at her worn-out face her mother gets anxious about the sign of roughness on her cheeks which was not there when she stepped out in the morning.

Through the window gusts of evening wind surge like a reckless buffalo. The typist girl washes herself, changes saree, prepares tea, stands by the window, Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and grows old quietly longing for the past.

Her vigilant mother keeps count of her money and menstruations, of signs on her cheeks and of her myriad thoughts, expressions.

If the typist girl tosses and turns in her sleep, her mother shakes her up admonishing: "wash your face with cold water, a typist girl has no right to see dreams."



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Nabin Biswabandhu

Give Me Your Word, My Friend

Give me your word, my friend that henceforth you won't be coming all alone without giving me any prior information.

To extend you a hearty welcome at the railway station,
I will send my loyal contingent of words.
However, be careful while stepping into this city.

These days, this city no longer belongs to us.

The gentle, innocent citizens of this city are either dead or bedridden.

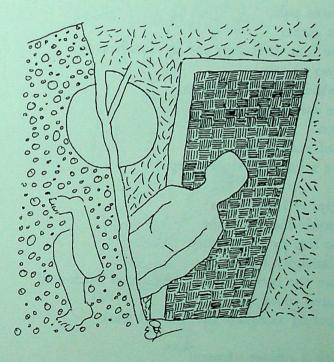
Here, the streetlights burn throughout the day and night because our alleyways are notorious for having too many dark corners from where a bullet could be fired or a hand grenade could be lobbed at anyone.

These days, walking on the city roads is no more safe. It isn't safe even to go and pray at the temple, mosque, church or gurudwara. One can't move about on the road absent-mindedly puffing away a bidi or leisurely enjoying fried groundnuts. One really feels scared of roaming alone on the city roads.

Now, on the roads, military troops could be seen marching ahead in a parade. Somewhere along the way, some ill-fated men could be seen dying instantly.

My dear friend, never come alone to this city. Whenever you come, please do inform.

For your grand welcome, I will send my own men to receive you or I will come myself and take charge of you very carefully by carrying you secretly inside the very core of my heart.



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Namita Nayak

You're Such a Strange Garment

You are such a strange garment which I could neither wear to my heart's content nor shed entirely.

When I wrap you around my tender body the sun in the sky suddenly turns pale, dark clouds gather from all the four directions and it rains heavily. A thick layer of mist clogs my windows and skylights. And in the dark aisanya corner of my room the flame of your desire flickers like a lone mystique lamp.

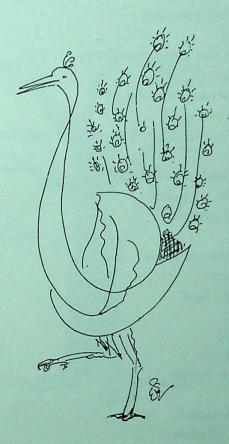
Despairingly, as I place you carefully inside the wardrobe the morose tree pays obeisance to the melancholy bird, from within the crevice of the dilapidated brick-wall gray coloured moss keeps sprouting alongside the flow of tears.

You're such a strange garment that I split and burn myself out incessantly torn in between the dilemma of wrapping you around for half of the day and shedding for the rest half.

In the sultry afternoon of April it is your surprise kiss which sets fire to my tattered palm like that of a scorching sun.

You're such a strange garment!

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda



Namita Nayak / 33

H

Pabitra Mohan Dash

Words

Words turn into firecrackers and blow themselves up on the stage.

Words turn into tall promises then shrink inside the faded pages of the party manifesto.

Words turn themselves into objects of men's lust and rot inside the glossy, multicoloured newspaper supplements.

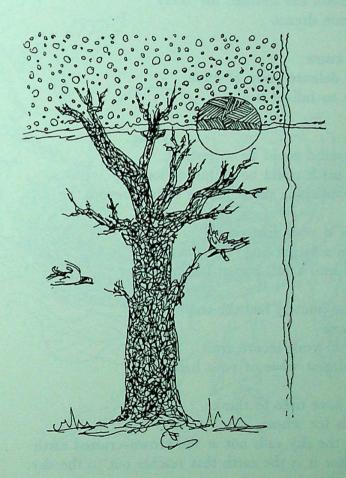
Words turn into melodious jingles and gyrate in tune with the half-clad nymphs.

Words turn into sacred ashes and fall like sermons from the godmen's lips.

Words turn sterile and lie exhausted inside the obscure books.

Words have been tamed in the babble of utterances and curl inside the false clapping of a baffled audience. Dead words! How could I possibly inject life into you?

How I could jump over your corpse to reach the other side of meaning?



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Preetidhara Samal

Touch

For the first time the monsoon has touched my body like a green dream.

I didn't know that this delicate body of mine could be so full of fire,

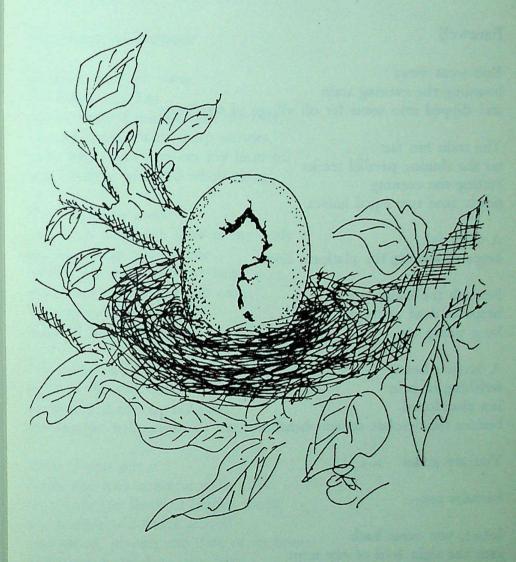
that the mind could be so restless, that the earth could be so full of longing that the vast blue sky could be so mischevous.

It was as if your first touch and from a virgin bud I turned into a full blown Parijat flower

When the hunters laid the trap around one
I flew into your secure arms at the faintest wave of your hands.

I didn't have time to think who calls for whom, whether the sky calls out at the brown-crusted earth or whether it is the earth that reaches out to the sky.

But it is certain that as you touch me my desire to burn myself becomes stronger even during the fiery season of monsoon.



Ramesh Pratap

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Farewell

You went away boarding the evening train and slipped into some far off village of treachery.

The train ran fast on the shining parallel tracks cutting the evening neatly into two equal halves.

A deep sigh keeps scratching the platform floor.

Beneath the lampposts heaps of dead nocturnal flies keep piling up.

A broken heart, writhing in pain lies abandoned besides the desolate cement bench

You are gone!

Perhaps not-

Infact, you came back into the tight fold of my arms boarding the down train of memories.

Saroj Mohanty

The Song of Hunger

If you could take away my hands and legs, pierce pointed needles into my eyes, cut my tongue with sharp scissors, then why don't you cut my head off and be done with the whole thing!

You better be aware that even after each limb of my body is taken away one by one leaving me only with my head even then my hunger will raise its stubborn head with all its audacity.

No matter whatever be the placebe it in the vast desert of the Thar or in any snow-covered city, my hunger will sprout its legs and hands on its own.

Even if you put it inside the four concrete walls or within the fence of barbed wires; my hunger will move around undaunted, playing the flute of its bones and singing aloud its own song.

My hunger will wander through the maze of the narrow bylanes of the city and its crossings like a bloody marauder; smearing the dust of his village on his forehead mud on his bare feet emitting black smokes from his nose baring his teeth.

That's why I say, cut of my head! Neither will the head remain nor will you have the trouble of coming to me in different guises.

Let the cruel story of hunger stomach and deceit be finished once for all.



Senapati Pradyumna Keshari

Orissa

You are like a frail tree that has suddenly gone barren after blossoming just once in a lifetime.

Beneath your unsteady feet lies only rocks and pebbles. No grass to give your body a green cover.

Your wounds and scratches emit hot vaporous steams, warm blood oozes ceaselessly from your nostrils.

You are a morning that comes soaked in blood, a blue wave of salt in the face of your half-quenched thirst.

Your tattered clothes bear stitch marks seven times over, your necklace tied around in twelve knots, your tongue stained dark with cries of help.

Have you really lost your honey bee appetite and dreams you had once carved out on dead stones?

You are a half-soaked bundle of cold anger. Your cramped veins are devoid of any excitement. You have a blow-struck heart writhing in pain. Your eyes contain chapters of a dead history You embody a silent, secret agony. You are not even aware that crows have pecked all the rice collected in your saree-end

Cockroaches run amok inside your empty bowls as your children return home with firewood.

You sit dumbstruck and turn slowly into a stone.

The sparrow which sits under your low thatched hut wonders if it would be wise enough to leave your place for such a kingdom where there is no dearth of food and water; village courtyard reverberating with children's laughter; beating of drums and cymbals; villagers getting drunk with *Mahuli* and swaying rhythmically to the tune of a youthful wind.

But, whether such a kingdom really exists or not is neither known to you nor to the sparrow.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

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Soubhagyabanta Maharana

Paperboat

Sometimes even a love-letter turns into a paperboat in the first showers of the monsoon

sweeping into itself the fragrance of the wet earth, finding its way into the beloved's

decrepit village shattered like the cracked summer landscape with the pangs of separation.

This, after all, is life like the fleeting colours of a rainbow, now here, now gone into oblivion,

melting into a silhouette dream in between our words and silences,

like a poem waiting to enliven ourselves at the edge of our sterile hopes and despair.

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Sucheta Mishra

Women Empowerment

There was a time when she was barred from entering the market.

Now she could bring the entire market into your drawing room.

She could take the tiredness out of your body.
She could deck herself up to suit your taste.

The smile on her face seems more attractive than her beauty and the shapely body of hers is even more attractive than her smile.

If you wish to buy hair oil you could see her dark cascading hair.

If you wish to buy soap you could easily have a glimpse of her bare body

Now she is ready to sell anything from shaving cream to your undergarments.

She could serve you many-hued dishes matching it with her seductive clothes enhancing your hunger. For her cracked heals
she could go around the world
to bring lotions
but she is at a loss
as to how to take care of her own cracked destiny.

It seems as though she has no grief at all, she could serve you tea smiling, she could wash your dirty clothes laughing her heart out, she could apply balm on your waist to ease off your pain.

Today she could sell anything—fashionable foods and drinks, swanky motor cars designer clothes, creams and lotions.

Also, once in a while in her moments of utter helplessness she has sold you her body, her desires, even her own child for which she didn't appear in any advertisement at all.

Translated from Oriya by Durga Prasad Panda

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Radhu Jena Speaks

Acharya Bhabananda

I last met Radhu Jena two years ago. His wife had, by then, already left him for her heavenly abode. His nubile daughter was to be given off in marriage while his son was still attending the village school. Radhu had probably completed 45 years and entered his forty-sixth year. His dark, glistening visage seemed to be losing its lustre. The ribs had begun to protrude.

Even now, Radhu Jena goes religiously to the field, yokes the oxen, twisting their tails as he ploughs his slushy fields and scatters seeds into the furrows carefully. After harvesting the crop, he stores the yield for a year. From that accumulated stock, he sells small amounts in order to buy a saree or two for his daughter and gives small change to his

son's school teacher.

Radhu Jena no longer toils on others lands. He now possesses his own stretch of land. Somehow, he has managed to acquire an acre of land, land he can proudly call his own. After years and years of cultivating others' lands, Radhu Jena succeeded in becoming a land-

owner about two-three years ago.

His neighbours and well-wishers persuaded him to tie the knot once again. But Radhu stuck to his guns. Whatever was lost was lost forever and couldn't be replaced. To hanker for it was but ridiculous. All that mattered to him now was the future of his two children. If that was secure, he could die in peace. "There is as much comfort in setting up a home again as there is discomfort, Babu. Why should I drag myself into a quagmire now?" he reasoned. Radhu Jena had long realised that indolence was a bane. He had the capacity to acquire an acre of invaluable land. What if it took him seventeen to eighteen years of relentless labour to get this far? At least now he needn't stretch out his palms, begging for mercy. His piece of land is just adjacent to his

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humble hut. Radhu gazes unblinkingly at his land, laughs a wee bit, sheds a tear or two and again stares incredulously at the strip, Was this land really his? Would his son succeed in retaining this invaluable possession?

Time just flies by. Today a person passes away and the next morning its already the second day. "Who can predict the future, Babu? Just the other day in the weekly haat, an acquaintance informed me that the government will take over our lands. Does that imply that eighteen years of relentless endeavours will simply go down the drain? Times are changing, Babu, anything is possible. Having persevered day and night over our land we have developed an indescribable attachment for it. We are workers who only know how to slog. Now, how can we live if we are deprived of our possessions? Babu, why don't you put a word to the government? You too have lent a helping hand in the fields. As far as my recollection goes, our entire Jena clan has grown up after serving your family with dedication. You live in Bhubaneswar and might be having a lot of contacts in Delhi. You've sat in an aeroplane and travelled to several countries in the world. You have lived in America and England for quite some time. Is the situation there just like ours? Now that you have come to our village after a long gap, seen our problems first-hand, you must keep an eye on our village. Do talk to the big shots in the government, please, Babu."

I patiently heard out Radhu Jena's pleas and grievances. In fact? I hadn't even had a clue I would be meeting him after so many years. Around midnight the jeep we were travelling in got stuck in a ditch near his shanty. Besides being pitch dark outside, there was a continuous downpour. Someone had cut across the path of the canal in order to divert the flow of surplus water from his flooded field. It was precisely near this ditch that we were stranded. What a strange quirk of fate? After eighteen years our jeep got stuck near Radhu Jena's hut. The same old hovel, there wasn't any perceptible change in it. Yet there was a difference. Radhu Jena was now a land-owner whereas I was an absentee landlord who had transferred some of his lands. Both of us were landlords, albeit of a different sort.

Both Radhu Jena and I lived together in this village eighteen years ago. I was the landlord and he the beneficiary of the rent-free land I granted him. Being of the same age group, we worked together on our lands. But today, if I've left my land for good, Radhu Jena has newly become a landowner. Here was I, forfeiting my right to my land while Radhu Jena seemed to be acquiring it. All this transformation took place in an interregnum of eighteen years.

Acharya Bhabananda / 47

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"Radhu, how do we pull out our vehicle in this darkness? If you could manage to get us a wooden plank from somewhere, we could remove it." In the twinkling of an eye, Radhu rushed to his shanty and walked out, balancing a wooden door on his head. Made from the trunk of a jack fruit tree, the door had a latch and a thin iron sheet clasped across it for support. This object was probably one of the invaluable treasures he was able to possess after years and years. He might have not only offered some paddy to the carpenter but also worked in his field in lieu of the door's worth. Now that very precious door has been utilised to drag out the jeep from the ditch. An emblem of the industrial age and the capitalistic society, the jeep had to trample Radhu Jena's door made from the simple jackfruit tree in order to surge forward. To spend the night in the dark, mosquito-infested muddy field would have been a nightmare. However, the intensity of the storm began to abate gradually.

But the storm, raging within the heart didn't subside. It wasn't easy to, either. The door had to be savagely crushed under the ruthless wheels of civilisation's carriage. The jeep succeeded in moving ahead. I instinctively embraced Radhu Jena. Taken aback with my unexpected act, Radhu was overwhelmed with emotion. A streak of lightning revealed his white set of sparkling teeth. Was Radhu Jena sardonically poking fun at me? Or was it a smile of simple geniune joy and not one expressing sorrow. It seemed to be a smile of amity and cordiality, though not reflecting any similarity of social status. It was undoubtedly

the smile of solidarity and not of the proletariat.

Our meeting ground was different. He, Radhu, was after all human, his humble caste, notwithstanding. When he steadfastly put up with his door splitting into pieces, his innate humanity came to the fore. There is no point in grieving over what was gone. God willing, he could get another one again. If you doggedly cling to the past, you cannot step into the unforeseen future. Radhu Jena, therefore, has

neither grief nor remorse.

We reached home in the wee hours of the morning. Mother was insistent. "You'd better change those clothes of yours and cleanse yourself. Defying tradition, you went and embraced a 'Mallika', a man from a backward community." To follow or not follow this diktat, was my dilemma. For how long will these obscurantist customs prevail? Will we ever get liberated from these constricted shackles? We possibly will, sooner or later. There is a ray of hope, Radhu Jena has now tranformed into a land owner. The winds of change are sweeping over society. I have left behind my native village whereas Radhu has attained

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fter all put up to the willing, ast, you ore, has

cleanse cleanse , a man diktat, prevail? possibly nas now ing over attained his right to possess land. His daughter will be given away in marriage and his son attends school. Immersed in deep thought, Radhu gazes at his land. By tilling this land his son will grow up to become a man, an outstanding man.

After daybreak, Radhu Jena landed at my doorstep. We exchanged notes on a lot of topics. He wanted to hear about the different places I'd visited. What he dreaded most was the government snatching away his land. So he implored me to take up his cause in earnest and plead with the authorities concerned in Bhubaneswar and Delhi.

"Radhu, your wooden door has been crushed beyond recongnition. Why don't you go to our cowshed and select a nice wooden plank for yourself? Do take a couple of rupees to get a door fashioned out of the wood."

But it struck me that Radhu hadn't come to me for his wooden door. He requested me to ensure that the government did not usurp his piece of land.

"Babu, try to recall how we cultivated potatoes against all odds in a dry patch of your land. Till then nobody in our village had ever grown potatoes. The way we struggled...One side we harvested rice while on the other, we had to water the potato nurseries. Fortunately, on Thursdays we had to refrain from harvesting rice crop as Thursdays are strictly observed as auspicious days in honour of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth.

"We could, instead, divert all our energies to the cultivation of potatoes. That's how we ended up with a bumper haul of potatoes. But sadly, we had to face losses as we couldn't sell our entire produce in the market due to the lack of proper roads and means of transport. Even now, we can't boast of a decent connecting road in the village. We break our backs and manage to get a fine yield from our lands, Babu. But we seldom get the returns for our labours. This once prolific village of ours has over the time become bereft of wealth, as it were. Without a proper approach road to this village, how can we get adequate price for our products, which we deserve for our toil? Why should we work so very hard if we aren't compensated for it? Babu, please put in a word to the government.....I have to leave now but I'll come again some other time to listen to your exploits in various farflung places. Why go to distant, strange lands, Babu? Instead, stay back in your own village and look after your agricultural lands. You have to simply sit cross-legged and enjoy the yield from the lands which rightfully belong to you. Why should you go out and save for somebody else?"

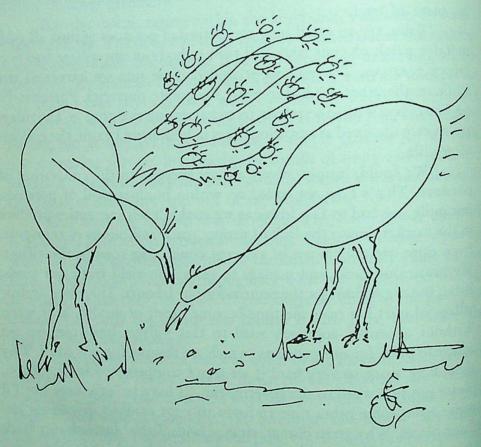
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri Radhu Jena left carrying two or three wooden planks of mango trees for replacing his door.

Eighteen years of history simply flit across my eyes. Radhu was

now an undisputed landowner.

I haven't returned to my village again... I'm safely ensconced in Bhubaneswar. Two years have elapsed since I last met Radhu Jena, I have not approached the government authorities until now.

Translated from Oriya by Sujata Patnaik



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M.K. Gandhi

Bhupen Mohapatra

I was taken aback at the sight of the visiting card on my table. In fact it was my Grievance Day, and I was attending to the petitioners by the names on the visiting cards. It was a Saturday—my Grievance Day. I must, as per the government circular, meet seekers of justice on this day and attend to their grievances. The word 'grievance' has become so popular from the imperial times that it is being used by governments in letters and circulars even today. Of course the non-Oriya ministers and officials, who would not get the Oriya equivalent of the word right, substitute the word 'with their own version—'complaint'. Otherwise the old version 'grievance' is normally used by all. I too like the word; after all this olden word with its antiquity of days gone by, has braved the onslaught of modernism till date and stood up with its head high—this is not a joke. I have directed my Personal Assistant to keep the Grievance Register ready before me on Saturdays.

On that particular Grievance Day, when I was through with four or five complainants, and bumped into the visiting card, I became a bit more enthusiastic. The card carried in ordinary D.T.P. inscriptions the name of its owner: M.K.Gandhi. I was both curious and irritated to an equal extent, to have come across the card. Someone must have sent in the slip to play the fool simply — I told myself — so that I would send for him in preference over others. This even fanned a little anger within me, but the next moment I reasoned: the name could be real; he must be having a genuine grievance to make. There cannot be a single soul in our democracy who will not have a grievance. Democracy and grievance complement each other. They cannot be separated. I cherish a particular opinion on this subject. I believe that death of grievance amounts to death of democracy. Therefore the fact that

M.K.Gandhi will not seek justice just because he is M.K.Gandhi does not make any sense to me.

"Shall I send him in?" asked Sri Krushna, my peon.

I find Sri Krushna to be rather abstruse. I feel particularly bad for him, because even though named after Lord Krishna, he has to do the chores of an official handyman. I suffer the same degree of embarrassment when I have to ask him to wash the used teacups in the office as well as my clothes at home in the absence of other regular servants. I never address Sri Krushna with a dismissing 'tu' like other officials; for his name I rate him highly among other peons.

"Sri Krushna! Come here," I said. He had stood outside, by the partly opened door awaiting my permission. Perhaps M.K.Gandhi had anticipated his turn and was getting to his feet, and Sri Krushna gestured to him to wait and came near me rubbing his palms. I asked: "Have you seen this man M.K.Gandhi who has come to seek redressal?"

"Which man Sir, do you mean Gandhi?"

"Yes."

"Yes Sir."

"How does he look? Does he look like our Mahatma Gandhi?"

"Sir, I've not seen Mahatma Gandhi. This man looks humble. I mean he is in a dhoti; he has worn his dhoti in the north-Indian style, with one of the ends running between the legs and tucked into the waistline at the back. He has no clothes on his upper body, his head is bald. He is in a pair of ordinary chappals. He is carrying a long staff in his hand. Must be someone from the *Below Poverty Line* category.' Sri Krushna spoke resolutely.

"Ah!" cut him short, "You think you would have seen Mahatm

Gandhi or what? Gandhi has been dead since many years."

"Gandhi is dead?" Sri Krishna countered. "Who said that he i dead? The other day we celebrated his birth anniversary. Everyone is the meeting said, Gandhi is not dead; he is alive."

I was shocked at Sri Krushna's knowledge of Gandhi. Matriculates apply for the posts of peons nowadays. I was shocked to known how terribly lacking in knowledge today's Matriculates could be.

"Then are you really saying that Gandhi has not died?" I aske

"Not at all. If so, would this country be there? This country to would have died by now. Sir, you don't know our fellow country men."

Krushna was all chuckles as he said this.

I was flabbergasted at his words. I felt as though Sri Krushna w

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not a Matriculate; he had done his Master's degree. Because there was not an iota of doubt that whatever he said was correct. His remarks led me to rear an idea: those who say that Gandhi is alive are those who have killed him in real; and if Gandhi still survives today, it is because of people like Sri Krushna, who are never bothered of his physical existence in the first place.

I grew more curious on Sri Krushna's thesis of Gandhi. I said,

"What do you say then? Gandhi has not died?"

"Not me Sir, everyone else says this. I say, Gandhi is missing."

"Missing? You mean neither dead nor alive?" I asked.

Sri Krushna quaked and put his index finger on his closed lips—he must not speak a word more. He tried to ensure if he had committed a mistake. Then he wanted to correct himself: what would be a right response? He must answer his boss correctly. Otherwise, would not the boss take him for a fool? He scratched his head in a state of vacillation.

Right at that point I fired my next question, "How can such a great soul go missing?"

I was eager to know Sri Krushna's answer to my question. But I had no idea that he had at his disposal such an easy and smart answer to my question.

He said, "Why? You think Subhas Bose is dead? If he had died, would so many people be looking for him for all these years? Someone was saying the other day that the Indian Government is investigating into the issue all over again."

He paused for a while and continued, as he caressed the skin below his ear: "Sir, I have another story to tell."

"Go ahead" I said. I was expecting another bizarre episode from Sri Krushna.

"The Chief Constable of our village Police Station is a noble man," he continued.

"Really?" I said. "Very good. But what do you want to say exactly?"

"He should be sent to locate Subhas Bose instead of the highprofile cops," Sri Krushna said. "He would fetch Subhas Bose from the netherworld even during the day hours. The man has apprehended real thieves..."

I could not hide my laughter. He saw me laugh and thought he was stupid; he should not have come out with the topic in the first place.

"Well, who do you think can fetch Mahatma Gandhi then?"]. asked.

"We all, one and all. If the government announces a proclamation on the matter, everyone will get to their toes. If all are not involved

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a lost person can't be located."

My Personal Assistant entered the room and informed, "Sir. there's just one complainant waiting. I suggested he come some other day. But he does not budge from his place. He is sitting there like rock. He doesn't move; as though he is meditating."

So I told Sri Krushna, "Go, send him in."

The man entered the room. I was shocked to see him. He was the selfsame M.K.Gandhi.

The selfsame appearance. Frail body. Bald head. Bare body except for the knee-length dhoti. He can barely stand straight, but he hasn't had a stick for support. I sprang off my chair, stood up and said

pitifully with folded palms,"Bapu, you!"

He laughed. That unchanged laughter, unsoiled and open-hearted. I felt that Bapu was the best among all the laughers of toothless lips. Only Kasturba, Bapu's wife, disliked her husband's laughter. Nobody else in the world has criticized that laughter. "Why are you grinning at everything?" Kasturba would ask, "You laugh when you are praised, when you are criticized; if someone abuses you, you grin; if someone admires you, you grin. Has God given you laughter to waste like this?"

Kasturba used to chastise Bapu for his habits.

"Don't err," the man said through his laughter. "I'm not the one you take me to be. I am another person. The M.K.Gandhi that you take me for has died long long ago. You know the Sanskrit hymncan the body that has been singed to ashes come back? M.K.Gandhi has died, can he be here again?"

I thought of Sri Krushna then. I wanted to call out for him. But can I be audible if I yell out from my closed room? If you want to call out for someone, the door should be kept open. I forgot then that I could press the bell and summon someone. "Gandhi has not died" Sri Krushna was saying this emphatically a little while ago.

"You are trying to hoodwink me. You can never do that. Don't I know you? Haven't I seen you before? Who hasn't seen or known

you, Sir?"

"You might have seen him before. How can you see him now?" he said with indifference.

"No, I see him even today, look there," I gestured at the pho tograph of M.K.Gandhi hanging from the wall at the back of my chair.

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"You think that is my photo?" he countered.

I was shaken. I cast my glance on the photograph. Then I let it scan the man. He had wrapped his chest with a chadar in the photograph. But here, in the room, he had nothing on his upper body. You could count his ribs distinctly. I switched off the air conditioner in the room to save him from feeling cold. The room was still cool inside. "Should I fetch a *chadar* for you?" I said. "You must be feeling cold."

He said, "I was born like this, without clothes. I'll die without clothes on my body. What will I do with a chadar? My bare body can withstand it all—winter, summer..."

He paused for a while and added, "You put off that machine, wouldn't you be uneasy?"

I felt as though someone slapped me hard on my cheek. My hand rose in a reflex to caress the cheek.

Perhaps he realized what I went through. He smiled. The similar smile once again.

"Leave it," he said, "it could be that you have seen me earlier. I've nothing to add to that. But yes, I am M.K.Gandhi. I have come to put forth my grievance. I have been planning to come here since long. But what to do?"

"You could have sent for me," I said. "Why did you take the trouble..."

He burst into laughter again. This time tears showed up in his eyes as he laughed. Both the eyes filled with water. His voice was somehow throttled from within. As if he wanted to say something, but was unable to do it. In a while he managed to rein in his stifling breath, let out a deep sigh and said, "If only that had happened...India would have been a land of gold by now."

He hung down his face and remained glued to his chair, like the M.K.Gandhi at the Round Table Conference, sombre and quiet as he had submitted the memorandum to the British government.

I was studying his face. As if myriad sorrows and concerns began to shine their hues there.

That brief sentence from him drove me to immense embarrassment. I had no way to slip away. When an entire colossal empire remained subservient to his grip, cried for relief, and had to surrender and flee its colony, who am I? I am so petty and inconsequential!

Now I too toyed with the idea of how to escape. I mustered courage and said, "Okay Sir, let me listen to your grievance now. If you are not M.K.Gandhi, then let me know what complaint you have. And make it fast. Be specific too. I have very little time. There is a

lot of backlog. Quiet a few meetings with the Chief and the Heads of the Departments. The month-long session of the Assembly begins from tomorrow. They don't want replies there, only questions. I have to be ready with that. Where do I have time for all this here?

Yes, tell me. You should have come prepared.

He let out his identifiable laughter and coughed repeatedly as he began to say something.

"Have some water," I passed the glass of water to him.

He waved his hand to refuse. "I haven't touched water for seven days now," he said. "How can I drink it here? What will they think of me?"

"You have not touched water? Why? Who are you talking

about? I don't understand."

"Those who have squatted before your gate to protest," he said. "Oh, that's none of your problem. That's a different matter."

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I sent for my Personal Assistant. I sent for Sri Krushna too. They had to work hard to persuade M.K Gandhi to leave the room. I thought I was saved from an uncomfortable situation and sat for a while resting my head on the table.

After some time I heard a ruckus outside and rushed out of my room. I saw M.K.Gandhi standing there, surrounded by my Personal Assistant and a few others. I walked near them; they scampered to one corner and huddled there.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"While going to your office," M.K.Gandhi replied, "I had left my staff with your P.A. He said, the rule does not permit to carry the staff to the Officer's room. Now I can't find my staff. What do I do now?"

Meanwhile Sri Krushna ran towards us from the corridor. He gasped for breath as he said, "A scuffle started near the gate of the building and the policemen rushed there. They had taken the staff along with them. Come with me, babu, I'll get you your staff at the gate. What will the police people do with that staff anyway?"

Translated from Oriya by Lipipuspa Nayak

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The Escapade

Chirashree Indrasingh

Idhab Aja's illness has taken a serious turn. Yesterday, his blood pressure recorded an alarming rise. The doctor, who had been promptly called in by my father-in-law the very day his fever started, is fearful. He thinks, this is a critical phase; even if the old man survives he may fall a prey to insanity or may get paralysed.

We do not address Udhab Aja as Aja (grandpa) merely by way of respect to a village elder. His relationship with our family is very special. My own paternal grand-father-in-law and Udhab Aja were childhood friends. It was a friendship not merely of coincidence in their date or month of birth, but ran deeper; a strong attraction between two opposite characters. My grand-father-in-law, a fair and stocky man had more leanings for the lighter things of life; he loved song and dance and made it a point to take part in the village Sankirtan (chanting of God's name in chorus) every evening. Till the end of his life he could never spot his own fields or even count his money. Udhab Aja is just the opposite. The six and half feet, black and hairy giant of a man, when moving with his herd of buffaloes, gives impression of a primitive savage at large. His food input equals that of five men while his labour output equals that of ten. He keeps track of the goings on not only in his own household but can also reel off the history, geography and economy of fifty families around him. The two men were, however, bound by so much affection that Udhab Aja never treated us as a separate family. It is said, Aja had once risked his own life and sieved my father-in-law out of the flooded river. Even after the death of my grand-father-in-law, our family has continued its link with Aja through small gestures of gratitude and good neighbourliness.

It is eight years since my grand-father-in-law left us for heaven. He had no noticeable illness to mention. A day's fever had brought

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the sudden end. Udhab Aja, leaving his herd in the fields to fend for itself, had come running. At the sight of his friend's lifeless body, he did not weep. Instead, he commented, "Sala (an affectionate expression) lived a pampered life. And now see he has also died a pampered death! I am left alone here to wallow in the dung of my herd or my own faeces." And to everyone's amazement he had laughed a dry cynical laugh at his own words before sounding a warning to my father-inlaw. Said he, "Don't you be in a hurry to offer the final Sradha (rites for salvation of the departed soul) at Gaya for him. Wait till my death; or else his liberated soul would give me the slip again and go wandering some world else. I would be left hanging on to the tail of Yamaraja's (God of Death) buffalo looking for him all eternity."

It seems that Udhab Aja's words were prophetic. For close to a week now he has been lying facedown, unable to eat or drink, at times running temperature of 104 to 105 degrees. The wallowing-in-faeces condition that he spoke about could be fast approaching. In Udhab Aja's case though, one could never be too sure. Not that, he has been totally spared the usual wear and tear of the aging process. Many of the signs are already there: swollen eyelids with greying eyelashes overhang the eyes, almost covering them wholly; tufts of white hair peep out of the ears and the nostrils; the once firm cheeks hang loosely on both sides and the random missing teeth appear like a line of ugly-looking uneven holes. A lifetime of movement in slush and mud has eroded large chunks of his soles and the shrivelled toes have turned gnarled and knotty. The nails have lost their sheen or are affected by torn shreds of skin beside them. The torso though still holds firm and the fierce tiger-like face still remains awesome.

Last evening, Aja's daughter-in-law spoke to my mother-in-law. Amidst sobs she told her, "For the good of all of us the old man should die. You know, if he lies dying for long we will not be in a position to nurse him. After all, he will have to be washed and towelled after each call of nature and it will be almost impossible for us to handle such lump of a man, by ourselves. Believe me, his arms even now feel like stone-pestles."

And the daughter-in-law's daughter-in-law who was around joined to improve the description. "I have heard it said that he could consume and digest two seers (one seer equals about two pounds) of buffalo milk at one go. You understate when you say that his arms are like stone pestles. In think, lifting them would give the feel of handling a pair of iron-clubs, no less!"

The mother and her daughter-in-law are used to such cracks

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between themselves. Although spoken in a lighter vein the account truly nails the expected nursing snags that the women of the family would face with a hulking man like Udhab Aja. Perhaps, it would be for the good of all concerned if he passes away gracefully and early too. Besides, if the doctor's forecast of possible insanity or paralysis really comes true, the situation would simply be unmanageable. Udhab Aja's seventy year old wife used to look after him until recently; the morning tea, the lunch, the cold-weather mustard oil-garlic massage, were all attended to by the old woman painstakingly even if she had to creep and crawl because of her own infirmity. But finally she had given in to her own inadequacy for the chores and the daughters-inlaw had taken over. But Aja's present illness has again brought her back to his bed side, although everyone knows that her presence is only token. Since the old man is indifferent about eating, the problem of cleaning him has not arisen so far. The daughters who have come visiting, lend their hands in the nursing, but eventually they will leave for their in-law's places and in case of a prolonged illness like insanity or paralysis, the entire burden will be on the daughters-in-law who also work and contribute to the family earnings. The family's financial condition is not good and even sick children go unattended. In such a situation, a bedridden eighty-year-old will simply be a drag on the family.

Although in the course of talk on the illness all these anxieties get aired, in our heart of hearts we somehow find it hard to accept that Udhab Aja is not likely to be seen around any more. For a long time now he has almost become a phenomenon in the lifecycle of the community; the vermillioned rock-face which compels obeisance and assures protection. This image of Udhab Aja also takes me back in time to my own childhood and my own grandfather who too had been for us a venerated emblem and at the same time a source of love and assurance. Ever since he retired from buffalo-herding, Udhab Aja mostly stays at home. His house is situated two hundred yards from our house. He sits there, all day long, leaning against the wall abutting the door. The indelible oily smudge created by his castor-oil-treated hair on the wall is a permanent reminder of Aja's presence there. He is never alone; a crowd of seven to eight children from the village usually surround him. These, in addition to the tiny tots from his own family ranging in age from six months to three years, who end up on his lap. All eagerly listen to the many stories he has to tell : of kings and queens, of rich sea-faring traders and their consorts. Udhab Aja reminds me of my own grandfather in the role of a loving authority

Chirashree Indrasingh / 59

who too regaled us with many such stories or taught us how to swim or made us ride make-believe, the mythical winged-horse (Pakhiraj) when in reality he had us seated on the back of a buffalo!

The setting in which Udhab Aja, our venerated emblem, has installed himself has been in place for the last ten to twelve years. A corner of the front verandah has been curtained off with gunny sheets to serve as dining space during the summer. During the rains and winter the gunny sheets are supplemented by partition screens made out of bamboo or coconut leaves. The space is also used as a bedroom and has practically been the living quarters of Udhab Aja since the days his family grew and the daughter-in-law, grand-daughter-in-law and the grand children filled up whatever little space the house offered. Earlier, may be twenty years ago, his wife had moved to the Dhenkisal (a room set apart for paddy pounding) in the backyard. It is a small, stuffy room without windows and it also serves as the lumberroom crowded with bamboo baskets, bundles of old clothes and other household rejects. Udhab Aja had shifted to his new living quarters later than she. Prior to the change he had been occupying the inner verandah. At the onset of the present illness the husband and wife had thus been living at opposite ends of the house; the man occupied the front verandah braving the sun, the wind and the chill and the woman lived in the backyard effectively sealed off from the sun, rain and the winter in the close confines of her room. Since the recent illness, they have been put together in the inner room vacated by the younger son and his wife. Grandma always keeps vigil at the foot of the bed. Most of the time Udhab Aja remains in a sort of daze. During the occasional moments of wakefulness he does not show any sign of recognition for the wife. When she tries to feed him with milk or candy water he shakes his head in refusal and turns his face away. Grandma has ceased weeping. Instead, she has been seized by an impotent restlessness. One moment she would be seen closely hugging Aja's legs and the next she would be seen thrashing about the floor around his bed with both her palms in desperation. In such a mental state she too needs watching and nursing. Only the other day, in an unwatched moment she knocked her head on something and got a swell but has been doggedly refusing to get massaged with castor-oil.

Last evening I had been to Udhab Aja's place. I found Aja asleep and grandma cold-sponging his forehead. For fear of disturbing them I instantly withdrew from the room. Even as I crossed the doorsill I ran into aunty, the younger daughter of Udhab Aja. As an opening for conversation I asked her whether Udhab Aja had improved some-

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what and had started taking his food. Aunty did not answer my question. She ignored my presence and with a disapproving cluck entered into a sort of aside not for me alone but for the world at large. "Chhee, Chhee (an expression of derision)! What a shame! And at his age too! He must be hiding his face for shame; how can he think of food or drink? We had come rushing, hearing of his illness and did not have the faintest hint of the occurrence here. Your uncle has returned home, suitably briefed about the goings-on here. My in-laws' family will now have a story, to taunt me throughout life. And I shall have to hang my head in shame for all times to come."

I could not help asking her, "Even if you had known the facts,

could you have avoided seeing your dying father?"

Aunty had noticeably widened her nostrils with sobs and hatred and chose to remain silent.

I was under the impression that the matter had been treated as closed by all concerned on that very fateful day or at best the next and the concern and anxiety about Aja's health would automatically have elbowed out the memory of the unfortunate incident. But no! I found that, not to speak of outsiders, even close family members have found in it an excuse for expressing righteous indignation. I am afraid whether the old man would be able to escape the dock, even after his death?

And, what was the matter? At around two o' clock that fateful night, grandma had suddenly given a fearful yell from her room: "O

O! O! He is killing me! The Thief! The Thief!"

It had been a fullmoon night but the sky was cloudy and there was also a drizzle. The combination of the cloud, the moonlight and the occasional lightning had created a light and shadow effect which made things visible, if not distinct, and also brought about a creepy feeling. We, like many of our neighbours, had retired to the safety and cosiness of our warm beds. Because of the feebleness of grandma's voice her call 'Thief, Thief' would ordinarily have gone unheard. But as chance would have it, the grand-daughter-in-law of the house had just woken up to breastfeed her infant son. She acted the sensor; received the oldwoman's feeble call; amplified it with her youthful voice; roused her husband from bed; and then, what with the lighting of lanterns, of running for sticks and the resultant hullabaloo, awakened the entire neighbourhood. The focal point of all attention had been grandma's room from where the alarm had been sounded. Udhab Aja was found lying face down on the floor and his wife stood shaking with fear beside him. Grandma is reported to have confided to her grand-daughter-inlaw, "My! My! I believe a ghost it was that pinned me down....a ghost!"

The happening had immediately attracted commentators. The youngest grandson, the one who had taken four chances to clear his matriculation examination and had recently managed to get admitted to the local college, shot a volley of obscenities at *Aja*. I had taken him as a withdrawn sort of fellow who walked the streets with his face chastely down. The only time I had seen him run about on errands, called for or not, was during the annual staging of the village drama. But on that day, the dirty words he used embarrassed us into silence and hasty retreat.

The next day the entire village had lapped up the story of the shameless conduct of Udhab Aja. Conferences were held on age-barred sexuality; and the news spread. Even Aja's youngest brother-in-law who lives in my parents' village and is deaf, had been quickly and loudly briefed. He came rushing in a trolley-rickshaw and arrived at lunch time to counsel his brother-in-law on the art of graceful ageing. He instructed his senior, "Brother dear! We are not getting any younger by the day. It is time now for us to think of the other world, time to free ourselves from worldly trappings and time to concentrate on God, in thought and in speech. This craving for women and gold is an illusion; they are poison, deadly poison, brother! Dust we are and unto dust we shall return. You should think only of God, brother. Falling a prey to the lure of the flesh, at this ripe age when your own children have grown to manhood and woman-hood is sinful and would certainly invite censure and social outrage."

The censure and social outrage had not been long in coming. A snide comment here, a meaningful smile there and an expressive gesture elsewhere had kept the village feverishly busy for quite sometime after the event. Rama Nanda had wise-cracked, "Chilli gets hotter as it ripens." Uncle Mahapatra had recalled the gossip he had heard in his childhood. The story was that Udhab Behera in his youth had been quite a playboy. He used to take his herd of buffaloes to the other bank of the river for grazing and on his way back in the evenings rolled and romped merrily with the girls who worked in the fields. Biswal uncle in an attempt to spice the story, had added that all this fun had cost him only pitcherfuls of buffalo milk, no more!

The women of the village had discussed among themselves that the old man was born under the zodiac sign Gemini and therefore, fawned upon his wife. Come the rains and the man would gather wild Kia flowers and hang them above his bed. On his trips to the Hat (market place) he would never miss making a variety of purchases for the wife: candies and other goodies; ribbons, talcum powder and fancy

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been known to spend a night outside his home; he had always made it a point to return home even if it meant battling a river in spate or the inky darkness of a newmoon night or a raging storm. And yes, I recall now that our own Charu Nani had joined in, with a piece of scandalising data about the couple's perception of conjugal life. She informed the assembled company that the pair did not observe any of the accepted taboos; for them Thursdays, newmoon-days and Sankrantis (first day of the month) were like anyother day in the almanac. Two other comments were also memorable. One pitied the oldman that his wife, a patient of rheumatic fever since her unmarried days, had now become a chronic case and could not be expected to keep up her performance. The other condoned Aja's departure from accepted norms

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Almost every household in the village had discussed the event; in Aja's own household there were strong and sharp words; the old man though, had showed no reaction. The youngest grandson had charged, "What were you doing in that room, honoured Sir? What work did you have with the old lady at that hour of the night?" Aja had merely gaped at him with an uncomprehending bovine look. The following day Aja had the rigor and then the fever with a raging temperature which made his body almost like a hot-oven. And he has been down since then without food and water.

of conduct on the ground that such freak behaviour was usual before

the end and old men, like children, should not be held accountable for

their conduct! Misgivings were also voiced that some of us may have

to pass through such a phase in the fullness of time.

After about a fortnight of regular treatment, Udhab Aja has been able to overcome his illness. At one point of time, anticipating the worst, preparation for his obsequies had already been set afoot. Ganga-water and Nirmalya (dried rice) of Lord Jagannath had already been administered and his eldest son had even set apart a bag of paddy for conversion to parched rice required for the ceremonies. But Aja survived; the survival was a wonder, but he did overcome the crisis.

However, the occurrence, the gloss on the occurrence by people around him and the spell of illness following it have brought about a great change in Aja's life. Udhab Aja is a changed man now. He is alive in the sense that there are no visible signs of disease and the boneframe holds; but the pith and substance of the man is lost; lost to the unalloyed image of the acceptable oldman.

Chirashree Indrasingh / 63

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Earlier, one would find this jovial man always in the company of children, keeping them glued to himself by the vast reportoire of stories, ranging from kings to cabbages. The children listened to him with great fascination even as they watched Aja knead and blend tobacco and lime in the hollow of his palm during pauses taken for the purpose. Then Aja would chuck the blended mixture into his mouth, allow it to melt for a moment and then start sucking the juice. Refreshed, he would look around his young audience and with a flourish announce that the recipe for his chewing tobbaco was the same as the recipe for the tobacco chewed by the Gajapati king of Orissa. The tale would then be resumed. That was Udhab Aja; vivacious, ebullient and full of life.

But the transformed Aja is almost mute. He spends his days sleeping or occasionally visiting the river bank with the help of his walking-stick. There, beneath the shadow of the leafy overhanging boughs of the ancient banyan tree, he leans against the trunk and break into snatches of folk Oriya songs of renunciation:

O my dried bones, Don't you tire yourself with yearning For this world of illusion

or alternatively parrots the well-known lines from the Manobodh Chautisa (a didactic book of poetry) which bring out the futility of all mundane possessions and worldly relations:

All that you have amassed,
All whom you call your own
Will be of no avail.
When the breath leaves the body
They will call you a ghost.
Your women will get spells cast
To shield their precious bodies from you;
And the family will assemble
To cleanse itself
From the defilement by your death.

I know for sure that Aja will never again be his old self nor wi he ever be able to escape the encircling grey of renunciation and ent the other circle of greenery, of beauty and of the fullness of livin

Aja no longer dreams. There was a time when he luxuriated dreams; the scintillating starry dreams of the nights and the dreams of the days. Under the canopy of dreams he got reli

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from the scorching realities of life. The dreams had been scenic and peopled; as when he would see the vision of the girl (Ghana Behera's daughter) with the green sari tending her cattle on the bank of the flooded river and fancy her as a Teeha (blue jay). The vision would swiftly fade and in its place would come another, this time a procession of scenes: a literate grandson who lives in a house with an asbestos roof; a successful great-grand-son who rears a large herd of buffaloes, gets dowry of a big milch buffalo and on the wedding platform proudly recounts before the priest the line of his ancestry, including the name of Udhab Charan Behera his great-grand-father, the picture of an anxious couple carrying a fevered child to a Kabiraj (village physician) ten miles away; of a caring husband taking measure of the ailing wife's temperature in a wintry night or the profile of a grand-father trying to spot the group of his own grand children playing in the moonlight.

At the core of Aja's being was a spring of life which flowed and flooded everything around him; his friends, his herd, the children, his wife, the mist and dew in the county side, the flowing river-water, the stars in the sky, the memory of a beautiful distant temple and the green luxuriant grass of the grazing fields. Aja's affection was all-embracing; an intense yearning for togetherness and for protecting all that he loved. On that creepy night of the occurrence, he had been shocked to stupefication at his own grandson accusing him of indecent conduct, when he only had had a sudden urge to give company and extend his protective arms to his ageing wife. During the following period of illness and recovery the man's self-doubt had shaken him empty till he meekly surrendered to conformity, to the conventionally accepted image of an old man.

Aja has ceased taking interest in the life around him. He no longer enthuses from his verandah the Kabadi players in the village alley and the sight of his weeping great-grandson does not draw any response from him. And his eyes appear above the scenes like a pair of unseeing glassballs.

Translated from Oriya by Alekh Kumar Patnaik

The Golden Fish

Jagdish Mohanty

It was dusk by the time we reached Chandipur. A sudden cloud burst had barred our way. On the wayside was stretched out the weekly village market. For a distance, the road heading towards the Missile Testing Centre pulled us magically. No sooner did Pupun free himself from the hypnotic lure than he was stopped by a herd of deer.

At the shore, it seemed as if the sea had turned its back in a sulking mood. Archana was of course not thrilled. There is opulence in the sea at Puri. Solemnity at Gopalpur and fearful solitude at Konarka's Chandrabhaga. The sea at Chandipur was different from all these. A rustic beauty in a fashion show, you might say!



Beneath our feet, there are terrified crabs! Scurrying for dear lives, frantically they dive into the sand for cover, startling Pupun. Is the crab a vegetarian or meat eater? Pupun who got 98% marks in the examination of class three and secured third position does not quite know the answer. Do I have the answer? There are so many mysteries that I do not know: man's birth and death, the many universes like our own. Clearly there is a lot that I know nothing about!



Archana called out: "Pupun, let's go and touch the waves!"

"Yes go and hug them!" urged the tourists. Soon the sea was going to recede two or three kilometres. Scared, Pupun said in a desperate act of self-assurance: "There Is no crab here!"

"It will do you no harm Pupun!"

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"Crab eats meat. It's a man-eater!" After all, man dies by the sting of a scorpion!"

"Well, crab and scorpion are not one and the same; you know! The crab certainly does not eat men."

"Of course it does!"

"Take my word Pupun! My experience of forty long years!" I said, "Believe me, the crab does not eat men!"

Pupun's eyes showed signs of disbelief. The shore at Chandipur was gradually receding. Archana called out: Come on Pupun, come and touch the waves!

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Why are you so scared, my son! How can you secure life from fire, water, air, accidents and death? Listen, life can never be transient! Fire cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, air cannot blow it! Only in the hands of an assassin, do we finally die! Offer your salutation to him! Not to the fire, water or the air! Roll life like a ball! Let it roll on the hard soil, dry grass, thorn and the rocks! And then, you will see that you have gone ahead my boy! Or else, you will find yourself forever standing still!

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Pupun did not proceed further. He could not believe that we had taken up fear as the dress of custom. He could not remove the dress. And yet, his whole life would be spent in the stifling heat.

I screamed: "Go Pupun, go! Go to the Sea."

Pupun did not move. He released his defiant hand from my trusting fist. I shook in anger. Landing a big blow on his back, I yelled: "Go to the sea, you little coward!"

Hearing my scream, two tourists turned back. The girl singing Rabindra Sangeet abruptly stopped. The sea got scared and receded a few steps. Archana moved forward and taking Pupun in her lap, remonstrated: "Just, what do you think you are doing? If you insult the child before all, don't you think he will develop a complex!"

Pupun's birth had completely changed my world. Stepping out of the operation theatre of the Nursing Home, the nurse had let me hold the newborn baby. With him snuggled between my two palms, I had

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entered into a strange new world that recognized no distinction between obscenity and propriety. Only nudity made for beauty here. Till yesterday, the woman who concealed her prized possessions inside her blouse, now felt free to acknowledge her motherhood in public. Before me, there lay an aged world. Holding the cherubic hands, I had stepped into that world that day, precisely at twenty minutes past ten A.M. To be sure, I have always been a contented and successful man. There was no shame of South Africa in me! No problem of general election! Nobel Prize, Jnanpith or Arjuna Award! There was no 21st Century, radio activity, future of man, communal riots, fascist politics, extremism, price rise or dearness allowance. Absolutely nothing!- Only Archana for myself and the four walls around us!

And inside?

Well, sofa, T.V., dining table, glass, almirah, carpet, cooler for the heat of summer and room heater and geyser for the cold season. Also, there was mixie, hot pack, Banarasi saree, coat, suit, expensive quartz watches, a scooter-and Archana's growing waist line.

At that moment, Pupun was our only achievement. Three years after our marriage, every one near and far, the in-laws as well as well our own people-meaning the whole society-had become obsessed with a single thought: Why was there no Pupun in our life! As it is, Archana had irregular periods. Before her sanguine encounter every time, she used to dream that Pupun had come in to her womb. And yet, there had been no sign of Pupun. Only a bloody coldness!

I had little shame or guilt as to why there was no Pupun in our life, much as Archana forever agonized on this account. We had a good bunglow and scooter. There was jewellery in the bank's locker. And we had status and social prestige. Only, there was no Pupun! That did not seem to matter, at any rate to me! However, Archana's opinion was just the opposite: that in every one's life there had to be a Pupunl Every one was capable of creating a Pupun! Only I was not! This was the burden of Archana's sorrow and complaint.

After Pupun's arrival, our roles were reversed. The one who had prayed for Pupun kneeling down at the altar of 33 crore temples, bathing in a tank of red hot chillies, she had lost all desires! Her sleep never got disturbed at night and she nearly forgot the date of Polio injection. Shaking the box of baby food at night, she would remark "Goodness, the baby food is over!" When Pupun had loose motion she would say: "None of them is necessary! Only a glass of sherbal with a pinch of salt and sugar will do the trick!"

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A handful of Bengali tourists loitering on the beach, turned and looked at us. Taking the injured self of Pupun on her lap, Archana admonished me: "You should never insult a child before others, it will only aggravate his complex." And then she said to Pupun "Come Baba, come my dear! The crab is not going to harm you!"

Shaking off his mother's hand, Pupun ran on and looked back. Eyes laden with anguish, he said "Allright, I shall tell my friends that my father is a demon who flings me into the sea!" Saying this, he fled on the beach.

Archana called him back: "Pupun darling, come and leave your shoes behind!" But Pupun was in no mood to comply.

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Holding the hand of Pupun, I had learnt how to walk. When Pupun had fallen down as a toddler, it was I who had cried the most despite his utter helplessness. I had suffered his constipation! And it was his hunger that forever fuelled the fire in my stomach! Pupun's cry had always upset our world.

Once when Pupun was one-and-a-half years old, he had cried out in the middle of the night. What could possibly be meant by the adventure of an infant? It was neither a war cry, a charter of demands or a slogan! "What is it Pupun? Would you like some water? Pupun pushed away the glass of water with his hand. Want a comb? Or a ball? Here, take this box or read the newspaper! A,B,C,D! One, two, three, four! Want to remove powder from the box? From the lower shelf of the dressing table? Want to pull out the broken clock from the drawer? Hair pin or imitation jewellery? All right! Now take this doll or that bear, tiger, cat or zebra. Or else, take the elephant that resembles a bear! Or the dog that resembles a jackal!"

Disinclined, Pupun pushed away everything. Suddenly, my happy and successful household had crumbled miserably into poverty. I had everything and yet nothing! For Pupun, that was my ultimate failure and disgrace!

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The beach at Chandipur has no chaiwallah. None to sell "moori" or shells! And there is no camera-man either! A group of Bengalis are busy singing Rabindra Sangeet. In the sky, the bright orb of the moon! The sea has receded to a distance. Only its muffled roar is heard now. The

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scooter lies in the growing darkness. Shall we go and lock the scooter? Dash it! The light of the Panthanivas is ruining the moon light! Is it possible to have a cup of tea? What a pity! May be, we could go down to Balaramagadi. By the way, the house of John Beams is still preserved there! We could even seen how the Budhabalanga river joins the sea. Godness gracious! Such a long distance from a cup of tea! Pupun dear, do not be mad at us! Here, have some "mixture"! See, the road is dangerously dark, interspersed with pits! It's a new place after all!

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Pupun's first day in school was a real experience! You should have seen Archana cry after seeing Pupun into the bus! The house appeared utterly empty. With her head on my shoulder Archana sobbed as though she had placed Pupun on the funeral pyre! A few days earlier, I was totally lost in Pupun's dream world of new uniform, tiffin box and water bottle. For the first time, Pupun could sense what it meant to have his own possessions: school box, books, note books, pencil, eraser, tiffin box and water bottle. My sofa, colour T.V. air cooler, scooter, mixie and cooking gas—all appeared distinctly trivial before Pupun's gleaming new estate! Equally worthless was Archana's jewellery! We returned to the nursery rhymes. Like Jack and Jill, we climbed up the hill to fetch water and tumbled down one after the other!

As for Pupun, he used to return like a battle tested veteran with dog eared, torn books, shoes grimed with cow-dung, matched with dirty shirt and pant. At times, the casualty included lost buttons and money, forcing poor Archana and me to join the battle. We could always sense his helplessness, like Abhimanyu, of facing single handed, seven warriors!

"Why didn't you beat the daylight out of the chap that hit you? You should have pulled out his hair! Should have jabbed his eye with pencil or else bitten him! What were your teachers doing! Must have been busy as usual, in their gossip sessions! Or else surely knitting their sweaters! Couldn't you tell them?

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Leaving the beach behind, we went looking for tea inside the village. When we returned, there was sea at a distance. Everywhere, there was a pallid moon. The beach floor shone with a silvery light! We sat on a broken wall, a packet of "mixture" in Archana's hands "Here, Pupun,

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village. ere was sat on Pupun, help yourself!" I said. Pupun, of course had no interest. No crabs were visible in the darkness. The light from the Panthanivas lent a sepulchral glow. Suddenly, a jeep drove down the beach.

Shall we go to the waves? asked Archana.

"Yes, let us!" Pupun aloud, his voice making the girl singing Rabindra Sangeet turn back.

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Pupun's Convent School vocabulary had always been a matter of enigma for me and Archana. There were many words that we simply could not grasp. And some we could not imagine using in our conversation! These words were outside his nursery rhymes and books. Perfectly abusive and unprintable expressions! Pupun, the war veteran's account never failed to amaze and worry us. His vengeful self, always spawned nails and teeth, his unseen eyes, cruel laughter and his invisible face sported pride. Once again we returned to our study of moral science. Once again we recited parrot like: "Always speak the truth Pupun! Get up early in the morning! See what a wonderful day God has created! Pupun, come and eat what Ma has served you! Read what Baba has given you! Go and play Pupun! Never quarrel with anyone! Return good for evil! Return kiss for abuse! And is slapped on one cheek, show the other!"

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There is now water beneath one's feet and yet they do not get wet. Only, one senses the feel of wet, sandy and muddy earth. Everywhere on the beach of Chandipur is spread out a layer of silvery moon light. Archana's emotional utterance: "Never have I seen such a sea in my life," and my state of meditative absent mindedness articulated earlier: "I was not impressed by the first sight of Chandipur!"—from all these Pupun walks away in a spirit of detachment.

Throwing a glance at him. Archana said: "You know, Pupun's virtue is that he has scrupulously followed our model of upbringing. But tell me, how exactly did we wish him to grow up! Do we really know what it means to be a good man?

Pupun's mind no longer had the fear of crab.

Walking ahead, he asked: "Mummy! is there a golden fish in the

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Pupun's life is sandwiched between Archana's college, her computer class, my office and our empty house. When Pupun wakes up, Archana is gone for her class. And when Pupun returns from school, there is Archana in her college and I in my office. Pupun waits for the maid servant. It was a persistent worry! Suppose the maid was absent, suppose there was a big lock on the door upon his return?....

"Why do you worry darling? Are not we there to think of you?"

If the maid was absent, then we would be there! Mummy or I would

certainly take leave and stay back!"

"I feel scared Baba! I am still scared!"
"Why do you fear my dear! Am I not there?

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"Get up at Five, in the morning! Begin your mad rush with Pupun in mind! Ring up from the office! find out: Has Pupun returned? Has Archana returned? Ring up the garage of the school bus! Is the school bus okay? Is the driver on duty or is he on leave? Ring up Archana's college! Find out if she has her staff council Meeting! In the evening, on the way back, collect Pupun from the play ground and make him do his home work!"

With all this, one is naturally unhinged. At times, Pupun seeks out his own destiny, devoid of parental contact and announces: "Give me the key Ma when you leave for your computer class! I shall keep sitting in the drawing room and ring up Baba in case I feel scared!" Only at such times does Archana notice that Pupun is no more keen to play or mix with any one. He watches other children at play from a distance. Helpless, he sits absent-minded on the study table, forgets his addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. And when he does attend to his studies, he gets arrogant and defiant.

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"Mummy, how does a golden fish look?" Pupun asks as he walks ahead on the beach.

Far away, there is the roar of the waves. And behind, there is the dim light of the Panthanivas. Further off are visible, the flickering lights of the Missile Centre's colony. Around us, there is slice of sliver. In the sky, there is the moon and clouds all around. Beneath our feet, there is muddy earth. Watch out, there could be quick sand some

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where! Every step appears uncertain. Baba Pupun, watch carefully come and hold our hands!"

The sea is far away. Only its roar is now audible. Those that sang Rabindra Sangeet on the beach of Chandipur, the Bengali tourists—they are not visible any longer. At a distance, the lights of the Panthanivas are twinkling. What is it right ahead? Is it a rock? Where is so much of fog coming from? Could it be fog or some smoke at sea? Or are we in the middle of the sea?"

"Mummy, what does the golden fish eat?"

Our hearts beat fast. There is no one in sight. What we called the beach is no longer visible. Have we reached the middle of the sea? Is some giant monster going to emerge from the deep? Will we get dragged into the depths by some undercurrent? Can not we have the glimpse of the waves? Or will our feet slip in?

"Mummy, what is the colour of the golden fish?"

From somewhere, there comes the sound of a roar! The black rock appears to be rearing its head. Everywhere there is the silver sea! It is there and yet not there! Forever elusive! We seem to be on our Great Journey, on the waters of the still and immobile ocean. Archana gripped my hand in fear. "Let us not go any further," she said, "I am getting scared!" "Baba Pupun, please come back!"

"Do not go any further Pupun! There could be a quicksand somewhere. There is no one around! So quiet and yet so fearful, this Nature! Come back dear! Let us get back to the beach of Chandipur! Back to the middle of the village, to the town of Balasore! Return to our town, to our house, our bed and to our secure quilt!

Pupun keeps running ahead. And we are frozen by fear! Not a soul in sight! Only the sea, the moon, the sky and the clouds! Death could be lurking somewhere! Pupun darling! Our creation! Come back dear! And hold our hand! Let us get back to the beach!

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Pupun went scampering. Standing on the jade black rock, he exclaimed: "Look mummy, look, I have become a golden fish!" From behind the rocks, like some giant fearful demon, the sea leapt with its huge monstrous waves. We shook in fear by its turbulence and thunderous roar.

"Is the tide coming once again?" Come on Pupun! We must save our dreams and our life!"

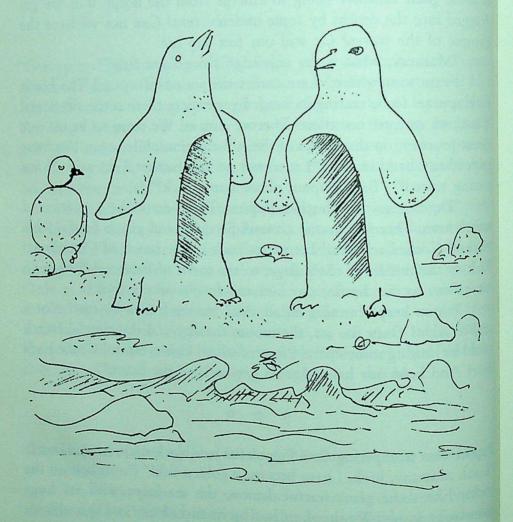
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A giant breaker came and dashed against the rock. Water climbed from our feet up to the knee and receded. With my hand as a grip for support, Archana cried out: "Pupun!"

With the noise of the sea, the cry no longer reached me.

Translated from Oriya by Sachidananda Mohanty



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The Foundling

Sanjoy Kumar Satpathy

Time's cruel hand had transformed me from a young cricketer to a middle-aged team manager. I was taking a bunch of cricketers much younger than I was to north India for a summer cricket tournament. Though Delhi was not one of the venues, the boys had insisted that tickets be booked from Rourkela to the national capital.

The Puri-Hazrat Nizamuddin Utkal Express was late by threequarters of an hour at Rourkela. The players were getting restless. Virendra, a Punjabi boy said, "Uncle, you must travel with us in our compartment."

At this, I became thoughtful. Perhaps the boys sensed that I was upset. They at once reprimanded Virendra: "We shall call him either 'sir' or 'manager'."

I tried to correct the misunderstanding: "No, it is not Virendra's 'uncle' that upset me. Rather the present situation reminded me of my own past as a cricketer, when I was like you.

"Like you all, I too was somewhat naughty. It was around this time of the year that I was travelling by Utkal Express for the Frank Worrell Trophy in Lucknow. The difference is that I was then travelling as a player, with Purusottam (or Purusu as his friends called him) as our manager: a most interesting person he was. The honorific, 'Uncle' usually upset him. When Virendra called me 'uncle', I was reminded of him. Alas! He is now no more."

"See, it was not my fault!" Virendra said, good-humouredly.

I continued pretending not to hear him. "Nevertheless, the incident, which had then taken place, lives in my memory as fresh as ever. It haunts me whenever I travel in a train."

"Sir, please tell us about it," the boys clamoured.

"No, not now and in this hullabaloo. Let the train pull in. I will,

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tell you the story once we are on board."

The train arrived, and the team boarded it. No sooner had the boys settled down, than they repeated their demand: "Sir, please tell us the story." The train picked up speed, and I, the thread of my narrative.

"That day too the Utkal Express was late by an hour. It was not possible for so many of us to get reservation in one compartment. Some were in S-5, the rest were in S-6. Manager Purusu was quite a sport, with a wonderful sense of humour. Unfortunately, his wife died after a heart surgery, and he had married a widow despite opposition from his grown up kids. Presently, he disbursed two days' allowance and declared, 'Now we shall talk about money only when we reach Delhi.' He issued a stern warning to everyone, especially to Vikram and Gautam, that no one should address him as 'uncle', especially in the presence of women passengers. That form of address always upset him. He said, 'Either call me by my name, Purusottam or just Manager'.

"Some players started playing cards on a makeshift table by placing two trunks together; some others started reading novels, the rest sat around the players as interested spectators. The lot was so engrossed in the game of cards and chitchatting that before they could realize it, it was lunchtime. The train halted at the Bilaspur station. The manager had alerted everyone about the notoriety of the station, and asked us to be watchful. Orders for lunch had been placed earlier: so many veg. and so many non-veg. thalis. God alone knows why I feel so hungry during these journeys. Railway food, bland and tasteless though it is, I still find it quite appetizing.

"After lunch when I went to the washbasin, I saw a couple with their 3-4 year-old kid. What a cute boy, I told myself! Fair with ruddy cheeks, and jet black, shining hair! His mother ought to have put a black mark on his forehead lest some evil eye cast a spell on him. His dad was not so fair, but was well-built. It was impossible to know his mom's skin color, as a black burkha had covered her from tip to too, including her face. The boy was very restless, would not stay put anywhere. He mixed freely with total strangers on the train in spite

of his mom's repeated scolding."

"The soporific effect of lunch ensured that some players dozed off before long. The child was with his mother. After lying down for a while, I returned to the scene of the game of cards.

"One of the members of our team, a Muslim boy, was so bored with the elderly fellow-passengers in his compartment that he sool

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so bored he soot joined us in our coach. He began chatting with the couple in Urdu. When the couple learnt that we were a bunch of cricketers, the lady lost the little inhibition she had. It soon transpired that the two were cricket buffs; hence they had named their son Imran after the great Pakistani cricketer.

"The woman removed the burkha revealing the most exquisite face I have ever seen. Almost everyone in our team was a bachelor. One can only imagine what thoughts must have passed their minds when they saw the beautiful woman's face. I wondered whether I have ever seen such a gorgeous woman. Maybe on the silver screen or in some glossy film magazines; never in flesh and blood. If only I could find a girl like her, I would make her my own, no matter of what religion or caste she may be.

"By and by, we learnt that the little family was from Bilaspur. The man was in the Indian Army, and they were going on a holiday. Men are by nature flirtatious. If all men flirt to a greater or lesser extent, how can we players be exceptions? We all had become oblivious of our existence in the presence of that full-blown lotus of early spring. Soon everyone was vying with each other to befriend the child. The child of a beautiful mother will always be much sought after by men, there is no denying the fact. Some men even try to entice the child from the mother's arm directly."

My players laughed aloud and said, "Sir, hats off to your power of observation! Tell us whether you yourself tried to cuddle the boy." "It is a sin to covet another man's wealth or woman'. When I repeated the adage, I was ashamed of myself as I too had joined the other teammates to snuggle the boy."

"Imran found the overdose of affection somewhat stifling, and would run off to his mother every now and then. After sunset, his father spread a bed sheet on the floor and started his *namaaz*. We had nothing better to do in the dim light than to gaze through the window towards the crimson horizon rather aimlessly. We were all somewhat distracted.

"Alam, the Muslim player in our team, who had by now befriended the couple, would often take Imran to his compartment." Here I stopped and said, "Okay, that's enough for now. We are about to reach Anuppur. Isn't this station famous for its *samosa* and tea?" The scheduled stoppage time at Anuppur is brief. But the railway officials, especially the guards, detain the train for a while longer. The shopkeepers and the passengers both benefit from this.

When the train started, I resumed my narrative, "That day, with

Imran disappearing with Alam ever so often, we all lost track of him All young players, we were very hungry. It was about 8.30 in the evening. The dinner trays were being carted, and the compartment was full of the characteristic flavour of railway food.

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"It was time too for Imran to eat. His mother began calling out for him. Wasn't he somewhere near me a little while before? He was playing with his toy and I was busy reading a novel, James Hadley Chase's The World in My Pocket. I remember vividly even now that when he first came to me and I offered him chocolates, he had said, 'No, Mom will scold me. I shall ask her first and then eat it.' Now, in the confusion over Imran I was unable to concentrate on the book. The Manager who was busy with cards said, 'He may be there with Alam.' Even that tip did not help. The whole team conducted a thorough search in the two adjacent compartments. People even looked below their seats. The mother was quite perturbed. The father blamed her and started scolding her in Urdu. Army officers seldom lose their cool; but, when they do, they are uncontrollable."

"We then decided to pull the emergency chain, so that the other compartments could also be searched. The train was in a tremendous speed in its attempt to make up for lost time, and a tug or two wouldn't help. The chain was pulled at several points and by several people. Now, there was no way Utkal Express would not stop. The driver and guard came steaming in; they were furious, and asked who had pulled the chain. The whole team said, 'Us' in a chorus. 'This lady here can't find her child.'

"Even gods have yielded to the beauty of women. These were mere mortals. The driver calmed down and said, 'The next station is Kutni. You can conduct a thorough search there. Also, the station

master there will help.'

"But that half an hour was like eternity. The boy had befriended

all of us. He had become a member of the team!

"When Imran was not traced even in Kutni, the couple got of the train. Though we could not see the expression on the face of the mother with her burkha, we could sense her anguish. We had nothing to give her but our heartfelt sympathy. We prayed for the safe return of the child to the mother.

"The Utkal Express sped on towards its destination. In the gloom surrounding the disappearance of Imran, none of us was in any mood to eat supper that night. All of us felt that somehow, the team was responsible for what had happened. Before we played the first match of the tournament, the manager told us that we needed to win the

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he gloon ny mood earn was est match win the trophy for little Imran. All of us were so motivated that our performance level was much higher than expectation, and we went on to win the tournament. On our way back, we again took the Utkal Express, with the same question in everyone's mind: 'Did Imran's mother get back Imran? If she did, was he alive or dead?'

Presently, my players could bear the suspense no more. They said, "Sir, what happened after that? Did you try to find out later on?" I told them, "It is quite late now. Time for the intermission. I shall tell you the rest of the story tomorrow morning."

The following morning, I was woken up by the hubbub in the compartment and the shouting of the *chai wallah*. I had just washed my face and was waiting for breakfast to be served, when a fellow passenger told me, "Kindly finish the rest of the story. I shall get off soon." Obviously, she had listened to me intently the previous night. The players had finished their breakfast in the meantime, and sat around me to listen to the story. I resumed my narration without any further ado, as I sipped my morning cup of tea.

"Eight years later, I was again travelling to Delhi by Utkal Express, this time with my wife and my four year old son, to attend my nephew's wedding. Suddenly I saw the same couple at Bilaspur. I could not muster enough courage to ask the gentleman anything. The mother had an infant in her arms. Had Imran then disappeared forever? I see the same question on your face as had occurred to me then. The gentleman asked me if he could borrow my *Illustrated Weekly of India* and started reading it.

"After a while, I broke the silence and asked him, 'Your son, Imran...?'

'You know my son's name?'...the gentleman said with a start. "I said, 'You may not recall, but I was your fellow passenger on the fateful day Imran was lost, as a member of the Rourkela cricket team.'

'Now I know why you look so familiar,' the gentleman took a long breath and said. 'I shall tell you what happened after we got off the train that day, but I have to prepare myself for that. Maybe, I shall have to get away from my wife for a while.'

"When he was satisfied with the situation, he resumed his tale: The stationmaster at Kutni was very cooperative. He telephoned all the railway stations on the route and informed them about Imran, giving them his detailed description. He consoled us by saying that there never had occurred a case of abduction in the area, and the child would certainly be found alive, unless he had fallen off the running

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train. After four hours or so, he arranged for us to be sent back on the van of a goods train to Setola, the station where we had first noticed Imran's absence.'

"After that, the gentleman fell quiet for sometime, and said, I knew that only a miracle could have saved Imran and he would come back to us alive. When we reached Setola, we were told that no one had seen anyone with a child. In fact, no one had got off the train that night. The following morning too there was no news about Imran. I told begum jan 'There is no hope. We shall go back to Bilaspur by the next available train.' She refused to budge an inch without Imran.

'It was evening, and I was gazing at the setting sun. During the day, my wife continued to ask every single coolie, vendor, railway official, cleaner, everyone she saw, piteously whether they had seen our Imran. It was eleven o' clock in the night. Sleepless for two nights, the anxiety over Imran had driven sleep from us. We could feel the fatigue, though. Just then, I could make out from the conversation among a small crowd that had gathered around the stationmaster that a lineman had found a child on the railway track the previous night. However, he had not reported for duty that day. A ray of hope was kindled in our hearts. On inquiry, I found out that the name of the lineman was Babu Rao, a drunkard. He lived close to the station.

'Without delay, we rushed to his house. His wife came out and started hurling abuses at us: about how careless we were, and how we were enjoying ourselves without minding the child, and so on. On the other hand, her husband had to put up with sleepless nights and beatings by the police. Was it his duty to attend to the child in the hospital?

'When she saw my wife in tears, she calmed down a bit. On being asked how the child looked like etc, she narrated the whole incident Babu Rao was on duty the previous night. When he was returning from the distant railway signal with a lantern in his hand, he noticed a child lying unconscious on the tracks near where the coal engine got it supply of water. He thought it was God's gift to them, and took the child home. The childless couple had thought of adopting him. Whet the child did not get back his sense, Babu Rao took him to the hospital On the way, however, the police caught him and, not satisfied with his answer about where he had found the child, roughed him up. The forced to speak the truth, he and Imran were escorted by the police to the hospital in a police jeep. This was all that she knew. Babu Rareturned home the following morning, and after taking a bath, he were

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back with some money. He had not returned, it was already so late in the night."

"The gentleman continued: 'We thanked Allah, and with rekindled hope we took a cycle rickshaw and headed for the hospital. There we were told that a nameless boy had been admitted care of Babu Rao. On reaching the ward, we were amazed at what we saw. There lay Imran on a hospital bed without a bed sheet, motionless. He was on drips. Babu Rao was holding the hand into which the needle had been inserted. It was unbelievable, the sight. Imran's forehead was smeared with vermilion and sandalwood paste.

'When we went near the bed, the nurse said that they had run out of all the medicines. We needed to hurry. Poor Babu Rao had paid for the saline drips and medicines. Now he was not left with any money to pay for the medicines.

'When he came to know that we were the child's parents, he looked in dismay and disbelief. He merely mumbled: Now you take care of your son. So saying he hurriedly left Imran, kissing him gently. He could not hold back his tears nor could he hide them from us though he tried to look the other way. For a moment I thought that it would have been better if we had not heard of Imran. The man looked shattered. He must have started dreaming of a new life!

'Imran gradually recovered in the same hospital. He was discharged ten days later. Amid all celebrations and a tremendous sense of relief, I couldn't help pondering how a devout Hindu had cared for Imran and saved his life unselfishly. Little did he care for the child's religion, when he carried him to the hospital. He could have done anything to avoid the trouble and the expenses.

'On the day we were to leave the place, we thought of looking Babu Rao up. We found his house locked. We were told that he was on his way to Tirupati. His wife had conceived after ten years of marriage!

'The incident haunts us like a nightmare even now. We try to forget it, as much for our own sake as the pain we inflicted on Babu Rao and his wife. It is some consolation that they were blessed by both the Muslim and the Hindu gods. True we got our Imran back. But we were forever indebted to Babu Rao.

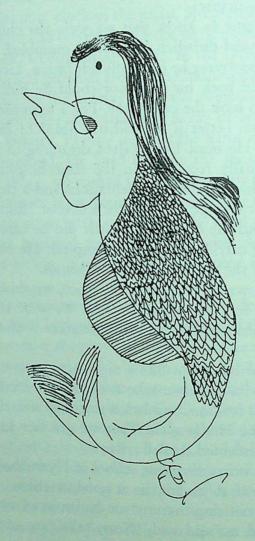
'Now Imran is in a boarding school in Hyderabad. A very well-groomed boy. Good at studies, he is good at cricket too.'

"Meanwhile noticing that my son had strayed away, the gentleman mildly chided me and said, 'Now, take care of your son, lest another incident occur.' "I asked him, 'How did Imran fall off?'

'Who can say, how he fell off,' he replied almost in a whisper, and thoughtfully, 'and how he survived? I only know that he returned, and know who to thank.'

"What a wonderful story" all my boys said in a chorus, almost out of relief. My throat had parched from non-stop talking. Virendra opened the flask and said, "Have some tea, Sir!"

Translated from Oriya by Sumanyu Satpathy



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The Touch

Sushmita Rath

xtending her hand, Sunanda was trying to touch the raindrops. There was total quiet everywhere. Shehnai was playing lightly inside the room. She had switched the lights off. She had been playing this game since a long time standing on the balcony. She loved the rains. She had a great deal of fascination during her childhood to get drenched in the rains. She ran to the rooftop as soon as the rains started after the long summer. She never bothered about her mother getting angry with her. Mother used to dry her head with a towel when she returned from the rooftop, totally wet. Mother used to say, "Come on, Suni. You are now a grown-up girl. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? How can you run to the rooftop just to get wet? What would the neighbours think? Should you behave like a stupid girl throughout your life?" The touch of love transmitted through her mother's hand seemed to overwhelm her even after all these years.

That stupid girl Suni had metamorphosed now into Sunanda. She was living with her husband, son and daughter in an eighth floor apartment in Mumbai. Her husband was a high-ranking officer. The

children had grown up.

For some reason Sunanda's eyes turned damp. She tried to reason with herself-she was turning sentimental only because of her environment. Tears welled up in her eyes these days even when she felt happy. Sometimes, the pain one felt inside her also brought happiness...yes, her chest seemed heavy out of extreme happiness.

She recalled that she had felt this kind of pain in her chest when she had just got married to Vivek and was waiting for his return from the office, decked up with flowers on her head. She wondered if she could press down her heart that kept on thumping

within her chest and bring it to a standstill! She suffered in the process But she had kept on waiting to feel that pain. Prapti was born a few months later. She went through a great deal of sufferings. But what happiness it had brought in its wake! She was wiping the tears away from her eyes time and again. As her mother caressed her head sitting near her. She had asked, "Are you scared?" She had been possessed by a wonderful feeling even though she had been scared witless. She wanted to hold on to that feeling very intimately deep inside her. She had experienced excruciating pain when Prasad was born. It was the time when Prasad was taking shape bit by bit inside her. She could neither eat nor sleep for days on end. The doctors had worried a great deal about her. But she had derived a great deal of pleasure from that experience. She had lost herself in wild fancies holding on to the head of the young Prapti. The memories of those days were fading. All of them had progressed quite a distance holding on to the hands of Time-Vivek, Prapti, Prasad and she herself.

Vivek worked in the top management now. Age was catching up on him. Sunanda too showed her age. Prapti got a job in the campus recruitment and was undergoing training. Prasad was studying in the college. They were too busy with themselves in this fast changing world. They would fall on the wayside if they could not keep pace with the change. Who wanted to see his name in the list of failures?

Vivek was always a capable man. He could take care of himself in every conceivable way. Sunanda never had to stretch herself on account of him. On the other hand, she had learnt quite a bit of housekeeping from him after marriage. She knew that she was really stupid until the time of her marriage. She might have perhaps learn a few-things if she would have stayed for a while with her mother in-law. But she never had had that opportunity. She had to accompany Vivek to his place of work after marriage. They had put in a lot of hard work to set up home. Vivek had explained everything the her in detail. She learnt interior decoration from the wives of his friends. She turned into an expert cook in a few days too. Vivel was always beside her those days.

Vivek had not allowed her to go to her mother even when Prapti was born. He found no justification to go there foregoing all the comforts and state-of-the-art medical facilities of a big city. Instead, he had brought her mother near them for a few days. He took care of the baby for a substantial part of the day even after the departure of her mother. Sunanda used to be amazed. How could

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And now! How the same Vivek had changed! Of course, he had to assume greater responsibilities at the office with each passing day. Sunanda was busy at home in looking after the children. Times were changing. Everything else too kept on changing. There was a great deal of difference in waiting for Vivek's return home those days and his return home today. The wait was colourful in the past. Today, it had turned colourless and to some extent, irritating.

The shehnai cassette had run its course. The rains too had stopped outside. It was already eight in the evening. It would still be quite a while before Vivek returned home. Prasad had perhaps been delayed because of the rains. She entered into Prasad's room dragging her tired feet after her. Everything was lying in a disorderly state. His clothes and books were lying carelessly on the bed. The window was left open. The window screen and the table were wet with rainwater. The towel was lying on the floor. The jogging shoes had been carelessly thrown near the door. Sunanda felt irritated. How could he be so disorderly being the son of Vivek? Sunanda was talking to herself angrily while trying to bring some order in the room. It did not matter anyway. Her anger meant nothing to Prasad. He would laugh it away. Sometime, he would pull her near the television and show her some American movie and say, "Mama, your time is over. Just watch how these people live. They find only one day in a week to put things in order. So, they get used to living like that. What is the problem with that? I cannot find half of my things when you try to put my room in order. I can't even find my books and papers!" Sunanda closed the window. She did not touch anything that was lying on the bed. She only picked up the towel and the coffee mug and moved out of the room. Prasad might be disorderly in his personal life. But he was quite focussed when it came to his studies or career.

Prapti had not telephoned in the last five to six days. No one was willing to write letters these days. They would rather talk on the telephone for fifteen minutes—but no one had the patience when it came to writing letters. There was no point in sulking either. The girl was learning the ropes. Sunanda could not disturb her all the time. She would call on her own in her own sweet time.

She kept moving from one room to another. Finally, she came and stood again on the balcony. She had nothing else to do except to keep waiting. This had turned into her major work these days.

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She was no longer needed by anyone. Sunanda started wondering whether she should start thinking about doing something for herself Vivek always kept exhorting her to keep herself engaged in different chores. But she did not feel like doing any such work. She longed to remain submerged in her own little world. And yet, she had a nagging premonition that that little world of hers was slipping away from her hands. Sunanda knew that she was allowing her imagination to run away with her. Her world had remained intact even today. In spite of that knowledge, tears welled up in her eyes every now and then. She thought about her mother quite often these days. She had not visited her mother since a long time busy as she was in her own little world. She was never sure that these people could take care of themselves in Mumbai in her absence. Vivek would be inconvenienced. Prasad would miss her and worry. Who was going to cook for them in case the bai did not come?

The calling bell rang. Sunanda knew that Vivek had arrived. Prasad too returned a bit later. The silent flat turned overfull with the conversation of father and son. She had been listening to their talk as she was heating up the soup. She thought that the house had been in the grips of a cold wave in the absence of these fragmented words. Perhaps that was why she had felt a chill inside her chest until then. There seemed to be a tremor inside her. Heat was now generated because of friction of words which was gradually bringing back life within her. Prasad said that he had already had dinner at his friend's place. He wished everyone good night loudly and went inside his room to sleep. Vivek washed himself and sat down for dinner. Sunanda also picked up her own plate and sat near him They made small talk while having dinner. Vivek talked about the office. Sunanda talked about home.

As she came to sleep after finishing the remaining chores, Sunands stared at Vivek. He seemed to be tired after a hard day's work. Yet he had the newspaper open in his hand. He did not have the time to read the newspaper in the morning. Hence, he finished is before going to the bed. As she pulled a thin bed sheet towards her. She extended her hand and enclosed the fingers of Vivek is her own fingers. Vivek smiled a bit in an absentminded manner. His eyes went back to the newspaper again. This time she pulled the newspaper away. She had sat throughout the day with her lip sealed. She had a right to a little bit of conversation; to hear what was happening outside the confines of the house. She talked of assorted things. She told him that Prapti had not telephoned. As if it was

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Sunanda's work have the nished is towards Vivek is manner her pulled her lip hear what f assorted if it was

all Vivek's fault. She said. "Your darling daughter seems to have forgotten you, you know!"

Vivek smiled. As he turned his back towards her while going to sleep, he said. "Remind me to carry the income tax file before I leave for office tomorrow in the morning. Oh yes! You are coughing throughout the night. Why don't you take your medicine regularly?" His eyes closed as he said that. Sunanda would have run her fingers over his head like a mother had it been some other day. But her eyes burned in anger today. Was she not a human being? No one wanted to spare even five minutes for her during the entire day!

She sat in a grim mood when she got up in the morning. She did not feel like doing any work. Why should she continue to stay there if no one needed her? Should she go to her mother? Vivek seemed to be overtaken by anxiety seeing her grim countenance. He made two cups of coffee and extended a cup towards her. He said. "Aren't you feeling well? Shall I call Dr. Mehra?" Sunanda remained quiet. She extended the income tax file silently as Vivek started out for the office after finishing his work.

She had to go to the market to get a cough mixture as also some other medicines. It was also time to pay the telephone bill. But she did not feel like doing anything even then. She asked the maid to take care of the various chores and lay down on the bed for a while. She came to the decision that she had to go to her mother one of these days. Prasad's examination was just ahead. But would Prasad miss her if she went to her mother's place?

She received the reply to her letter from her mother quite soon. She was happy that mother had replied so quickly. She must have been very happy to know that Sunanda had expressed her desire to visit her. She opened the letter and read:

Dear Suni,

My blessings to all of you. Have you continued to remain the same stupid Suni even now? I had thought that you had turned into quite a lady of the house. Your mother-in-law, father-in-law and Vivek have all been talking about that. But I discovered that you are still that sulking cry-baby of yesteryears when I went through your letter. It would seem that every small matter disturbs you a great deal even now. You still seem to burst into tears at the drop of a feather. The sobbing face of your childhood floated by me when I read your letter. What makes you so sad, my dear? This phase comes in the life of every woman. If you look at it, everyone is lonely all the

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time-it is just that we connect ourselves with other people. And girls are born with this trait. The more you can keep yourself connected, the better you are as a daughter or daughter-in-law or mother or mother-in-law. Give this a thought. All of you grew up, Your brother got married. He worked and stayed at Bangalore. You got married and you are at Mumbai. Your younger brother too got married after you. My home became overfull. But I started getting lonelier by the day. I was lonely amidst all. No one had neglected me. But everyone stayed away in his own work. You lived with your family. Your brothers lived with their families. Your brothers wanted that I should live with them when your father passed away, But how could I go elsewhere ignoring this old house in Bhubaneswar. the Lingaraj temple, my relations, my neighbours, your Sujata Aunty, Maguni Maa the maid, Dashu Nana the cook. Bauli the cow, Kalu the dog and Minnie the cat? We always get imprisoned inside the circles that we build for ourselves. But it would be foolhardy on our part to expect our children to stay inside those circles. You left me some years ago to set up your own little world. Now your children have grown up. They will find their own places where they will settle down. There is nothing to be sad about it. The world keeps on expanding everyday. Is it possible for man to extend his hand all the way? Man is getting smaller day by day. But it is not possible to touch the boundary unless someone keeps pace with it Remain assured that the elephant might live in the forest; yet, it belongs to the king. Your husband and children belong to you wherever in the world they might be. They will come running to you first with their hands extended if ever they run into any kind of trouble.

You have written that you want to come here. Come soon. I have been waiting with bated breath to have a glimpse of you. You might not be aware of it! But I know that the girl within you has already spread her roots far and wide in this world. She cannot go anywhere else. You might disagree now; but you cannot stay elsewhere peacefully for any length of time. Your insides will be in a churn. Not only for Vivek or Prasad. But also for the chair standing on your balcony. For the part of the sky visible from your flat. For the earth below. For the dog in the house of the neighbour. For the mad son of Lata, your neighbour, who keeps swaying from one side to the other while singing incessantly. Just think about if or a while. Suni. And then take me to task if I am telling you a lie.

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Me, my daughter, i.e. you and your daughter—each of us is a river. The river will keep on flowing generation after generation—just make sure that the riverhead does not get buried. That water carries away all the pains and sufferings of this world. That river will overflow the banks if we let go and start crying. Everything will get washed away in that. Vivek will be fighting for his survival. Prapti and Prasad will be unable to breathe.

Let the Lord provide you with the strength, my dear. My blessings are always with you. Ask Vivek to get you here sometime.

I long to see you all. God bless!

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The corner of her saree had got wet with her tears. She was breaking into a sob. And yet, she was amazed to discover that her semi-literate mother, who had rarely stepped out of that old house in Bhubaneswar, could think of all these things and write about them. Had she been able to know her anguish just because she was her mother? She had never seen this trait of her mother-it was perhaps because she had never felt the need to discover that. Today, mother had understood that her daughter was weakening. She had extended her own chest to make it stronger before the collapse of the bridge. That bridge was not going to collapse any more. She was not going to lose patience in a hurry ever again. Prasad was calling from the other side. "Mama! Mama! I am hungry. Aren't you going to serve dinner? You seem to be in a dark mood today. Shall I get some ice cream for you from the shop downstairs?" Sunanda quickly entered inside the bathroom. As she washed her face, she thought it was lucky that Prasad had not been able to see her face. Otherwise, he would have taken her to task playfully.

Translated from Oriya by Ashok K. Mohanty

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Worm on the Bough

Yashodhara Mishra

She lay there on the hospital bed, fenced around by curtained stands. She was not the same Anjali she used to be.

A khaki-clad police officer sat on a chair by her bed, taking down notes, pausing from time to time to check certain details. The dying statement of the victim was important. The family members had been asked to leave the room so that there would be no pressure of any kind while she spoke.

"How did the fire break out? Please try to recall, Madam

What time? What caused it?"

She did not reply to all the questions. The words coming from the burnt black lips were not clear.

Noises seeped in; people outside were talking a little more loudly now. Someone was comforting others. Voices were being raised

"What's the matter, Anjali?" he had enquired.

The police officer repeated his questions. May be Anjali cannot make out what he says, or she cannot hear him, or she is not conscious. The officer knows his duty well: he has to somehow squeeze out the details before she died.

"Were you happy with your life? Any complaint against anyone

What about dowry from your parents?"

Another policeman patrolled behind the curtains, baton in hand The elderly woman in the adjacent bed waits with cocked ears; but nothing reaches her. What is the horrible corpse saying from he bed? Why is she dying?

The body on the bed is opening its mouth. Can it think Anjali's meticulously arranged wardrobe glimmers. Sarees has ing neatly, not a speck of dirt on them. With matching blouses a

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Sighs escape from the khaki uniform, his eyes go back to the wristwatch. What waste of time!

"How many children? A four-year-old? Okay. Did you love

your child?"

The corpse shuts its eyes. Her blistered lips are pressing on the clenched jaws. "Mummy, give me chocolates for tiffin tomorrow." Chocolates were a must in Munu's lunch-box.

"Has she passed out? Call the nurse!"

The police officer sprang from his chair. Hopeless! Nothing to get here. Better to get the statement from the man sitting on the bench outside, his head resting on his palms.

Anjali opened her eyes. Have they left? But she hasn't told

them anything yet. Should she call them back?

Her own ears could not make out what sounds her mouth uttered. How long has she been unconscious? Or was she just recovering from it?

The pictures were overlapping one above the other. Anjali's flashy drawing room. Ajit's friends admire it, sitting there sipping tea. Their wives watch around from the corners of their eyes, and look away in envy. After the guests leave, Anjali settles down on the sofa from where the gentlemen had admired her, and she looks on at her own creation with contentment.

Noises came from the veranda, they are talking somewhat loudly now. A voice of authority quietens others. Several voices talk again. What questions was Ajit being grilled with? How did his face look now?

Generally Ajit was so cool and composed.

Seeing Anjali upset when he got back from his office, once Ajit had asked so eagerly, "What's the matter, Anjali?" Snuggling beside him Anjali had replied, "Nothing feels good these days. Munu goes away to school, and I am all alone." Ajit took her into his arms, with his warm, almost compassionate smile. "I know what you mean Anju! But don't you understand darling, it is the same with all urban middle class housewives these days. This is the riddle of need and fulfillment, you see. If you are denied something, it's the end of the world. And once you get it, it becomes cheap, banal! The mind cannot hang on to the same point of gratification for ever, can it?"

It was so easy for Ajit to dissect any situation and explain the details, like solving a riddle! No tangled knots, no puzzle was beyond him. Like a bright school boy he took just a minute to work it

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Where was Ajit now? What would he be thinking about? Was he thinking of Anjali? Was he angry with her? What kind of anger? What kind of feelings would he have for Anjali now, anger, hatred pity, fear, what?

Ajit was sitting outside on a bench. The police officer had just left. Ajit, who never knowingly wished anyone ill, what was he brooding over now? Praying that Anju's life be saved? So that he himself would be saved, from the police, from the world. But the woman struggling and tossing here for life and breath, is she Anjali? Who would it be to leave her hospital bed and come home?

The numbness that was seeping to his bone marrows, what name to give it? Panic? And all the other waves that took turns to engulf him, were they grief, shame, bitterness? May be all that has been consumed now. Only the horridly burnt figure on the white bed, and the man in uniform beside her, these were the only truths at the moment.

The indifferent khaki-uniform would take down all that he heard or fancied. Ajit stared vacantly at the white wall: isn't there a way to start life afresh, hold one's head high once more? If only he could catch at a straw from the past, something that was whole and pure

just a few days ago, like a quiet flowing river!

Lying on her bed, Anjali tries to focus. Nothing can be heard But she can guess how the questions would be asked and eventually the answer all of them would reach at. Anjali discovers that there is still something living and fresh inside her head. She wants to know what Ajit's reply would be. Would he tell them whatever he has seen, or just that he was innocent? Ajit, striding ever confident through life, always a master of situations, how does he look now? Though there seemed to be a wall between her body and her being, Anjal could still feel a surge of curiosity rising inside her.

The thought came to her that the image of hers that was there in Ajit's mind must also have turned to black charcoal by now. But what about the occasional surges of passion that he felt for her evel

today? Would it come to his mind again?

Doesn't Ajit want to know what Anjali feels now? Or the unexpected blow he is facing right now has blocked his mind 10 everything else?

But how much could she tell them in just some simple statements How much could be revealed anyway through the questions the ask: How was your conjugal life? Any complaints?

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Would she throw at their faces the truth they want, like a pellet from a catapult, that in spite of a loving and caring husband like Ajit she had been drawn into a forbidden relationship with Bikash? And when Ajit learned about it, she could not think of any other option than to kill herself.

The familiar, age-old formula would suit everyone. No one would get confused. Even the criticism and derision might die down with time and pity take its place. But would that put an end to their questions? Her heart was pounding in her lifeless form, but the mind was clearing up amazingly. May be the next question would be: How did your husband behave after learning the truth? Did you try to apologise? Or you thought your sin was too great to be forgiven?

And then would she tell them what she had in mind? No, there was no guilt. She was simply torn apart between passion and apathy, between Bikash and Ajit. Everything around her had gone so dreary and flat. Then came those sparks that lighted up her dreary life, all so suddenly, and she could not go back. She set fire to her own world.

Questions haunt her yet. But how did Bikash come into your life? Didn't Ajit suit you? Did you have disappointment?

When she shut her eyes, the room and the white ceiling vanished. But inside her head all that was smoky and hazy was clearing up.

Who else but Anjali herself could judge now if the man of her dream ever came to her life or not?

Now she has to answer the question, that what were the hopes, the plans that made her go ahead with Bikash. Did she really see in him the perfect man that she had been looking for all her life, and had found nowhere else? Not even in the well off, loving Ajit, in none at all.

But why this absurd ruminating now? She, like all her friends had never hoped to get in their husbands the hero of their favourite novels or movies.

The ideal lover. He dwells in the mind, who can deny this fact? He may come in the form of a darling star in a favourite movie. Or in the lines of a tune that has touched your heart in childhood. Or again as the young Lord Krishna on the banks of river Yamuna. The scenes of some novel might bring him in, spreading all over her sky like the monsoon clouds.

But marriage is something else. It stays where it must, like the house alter for deities. You cleanse your soul, fast, grind sandal-paste

and wait for it garland in hand. You open your eyes to receive a cast-off, stale flower in your palms. Why compare it to a living blossoming bud on a tree?

Then how did you take the wrong road?

Teens. Her eyes would at times rise from the ground, and meet another pair. She would avert her gaze quickly. These men were not worthy of her. Her life couldn't be handed over to anybody. She would preserve it, for some radiant ecstasy. Meanwhile the burntfaces could look on from far as much as they wanted.

What happened to the wealth she had carefully invested in all these years? She did receive something in exchange, there is no denying that. But what kind of deal was this in which you give away your

own being?

As though Anjali was testing herself, if the wealth been all spent or if it was still there. She was seeing if she had any hold over her own body, which she had once tamed, even as the reins were lying in another pair of hands now.

And as she tries her strength the reins slip out of her hands. Like before assessing the current you step into the stream. May be the first moment of indecision is enough to make you lose balance and slide into the unknown depths beyond space and time. It is only the first moment though. Next moment it is no more. Just for that much one gives up one's rights over hard ground.

Someone pesters again. It is the nurse standing by her bed She was asking how Anjali felt. Sympathy had transformed her from a hospital staff-nurse into a human being. But how could she reach

Anjali through her blistered body?

Now Anjali was all alone. Now she could face none except herself, could answer no one except her own questions. Did you have a happy life? What did you have for the most part, disappointment or fulfillment?

But why disappointment? Didn't she have all that she was used to, and had hoped for since her childhood? Which intolerable quality did she have to confront in Ajit? And there was Munu, their four year old roly-poly son!

"Arre Munu, watch out. Ah, spilled the milk, you little devil"

"...You hear? The grand clearance sales are on, near the Laxill

theatre, Mrs Mohanty was saying."

" ... 0 oh-o! You have caught a cold again. You never put of sweaters. It's so cold these days! You must go inside...What should I get you? Ginger tea or some warm salt water to gargle?"

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Events filled her moments. And each event was neatly confined to the space allotted to it. Perfectly aligned. That was Anjali's sleight of hand, and of course, her pride. No mess anywhere, not a speck of dirt.

Somewhere along her journey to womanhood, she had chosen this to be her goal, all she would ever want in life. Perhaps she had not chosen it consciously; perhaps it had come to her naturally. Everything had to contain beauty and symmetry: the body, clothes, the food served on the table, bed and the bedroom, walls of the living-room, flower pots in the garden, conversations and relationships. If anything ugly or messy got in the way, she knew the art of getting rid of it, as she would a knot of thistles. If she could not get rid of it, she would mend it—scraping a bit here, polishing a bit there, and everything became beautiful again.

When she was with her elder sister-in-law, she had spent all her time training her how to keep house, smoothing out her messy habits. Mr. Chadda, Ajit's boss, admired Anjali. He was a tall, broad shouldered, fair gentleman; but his mouth frothed at the corner when he spoke.

Anjali always invented an excuse to avoid visiting his house. Coming to think of Ajit himself. In their early days, whenever they went out, he greased his hair with hair-oil. His trousers always hung above his ankles or were so loose that creases stood out as he fastened a waist-belt to them. Anjali took care of everything personally. She gave up wearing stilettos after her marriage so that they looked a perfect couple when they walked together. She formed the habit of reading newspapers, so she could talk with Ajit about everything under the sun.

When her own elder sister nagged her husband, Anjali found it so shamefully vulgar!

But yes, it was not as though she could guide and control everything in her life as she would have liked to. Disturbing moments did appear from nowhere like sudden, frightening jumps from a tree. At times some queer helplessness numbed her, clouded her vision, and she surrendered before it out of sheer panic, giving in to an indefinable disgust.

Trapped inside the corpse of a body, Anjali's flawless mind looked back to her past. Those were the days of endless adornments, incessant worship of beauty. At some point she had also learnt to accept the rights of those unsolicited moments that crept into her days. She had acknowledged their power to break the rules of her

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games and disrupt them as and when they pleased. And during her half awake moments she would even be told that one of those moments was going to snatch away her life from her grip!

The question again: What is it? Which moments are they? Come

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Anjali's mind was worn out. So too was her brain, which had been feeding on her body. Yet, this is the opportune moment. What else is there now to fend for, to beg before God? So let me rather have one look at the ghosts that were scaring me from behind the bushes.

That's right. The most fulfilling were the moments of bedecking preserving and watching spellbound your own relation in the mirror, the moments of plucking flowers in the garden. She was perhaps very small then, a cool, fragrant breeze was blowing after a brief shower. Anjali came out of the house. The blossoming vine of French Jasmine twined around the pillar on the verandah up to the roof full of flowers. As she stood on her toes and pulled down a bunch, something stuck on to her skin, a lump of paste. The crushed mass of a slimy caterpillar!

Later, many a time, she had felt that the innocent worm grazing on the leaves of the flowering creeper that rainy evening had not deserved the shudder that had penetrated her to the marrow. Maybe it was after all the paste was from a rotten flower stalk. With jerk she had wiped her hand on the wall before knowing what i was. But she abhorred the moment all the same whenever it came back to her; no amount of reasoning or ethics could even slightly

lessen its intensity.

The moment crept back, again and again, with or without purpose, cause or hope, or apprehension, at times with justification

at others without rhyme or reason.

It spoilt her bright days of joy at times, when she expected it the least. The day she discovered that a new life was throbbin inside her, one early morning, she had quaked with the same shuddering tremor. The fresh, beautiful dawn around her sudden lost its lustre like a fresh fruit rotting. Her stomach was churning and a sour and bitter liquid had surged into her mouth. She had bent over the wash-basin to vomit drops of bitter saliva. Were he insides, in their twisting and coiling, revolting against the newcome who had intruded into the limits of her being, even before the state of a relationship?

Anjali, who was always eager to welcome the morning who

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she woke up, had wobbled back to her bed after washing her face. The bed had felt as if some long suffering patient had lain there; moth-eaten, stinking, but a comforting shelter.

The moment is short-lived. Once it leaves everything clears away.

The moment is short-lived. Once it leaves everything clears away. The morning gets fresh, more beautiful than ever. A sense of gratitude infuses her body and mind for some unexpected boon received.

The moment keeps returning. At her acquaintance with the tiny newcomer, helped on to the bed by the nurse. A soft thing of wrinkled pink flesh. The small mouth opening at the slightest body contact, groping blindly. The only self expression, that. Of hunger, of life, a demand on the other beyond reason or conscience. Alas! She was swayed by the same horrifying shudder once more.

The moment of malice retreats as it comes. Not easy to forget. It has to be pushed hard into oblivion. The feeling of shame and sin lingers on. But once again easy waves come over, bringing in fulfillment, love, compassion and joy.

The faithful, perfect life companion. Malice comes unannounced and throws everything into splinters: his cool confidence, his assertiveness, his modesty, his uncontroversial goodness. His small claims, big compromises. Even his capacity to take back his claims with unflinching calm. Can it be assessed or foretold: the unsettling moment?

Moment of malice. Unmistakable, like the symptoms of a known disease. Breaks in like a dusty sandstorm, permeates through one's eyes and takes you over. You cannot see a thing then. You want to chuck it out to free yourself, but you see you are chucking out your life along with it. You grow cold and insensate as you live the moment, but it's really hard to turn down its challenge. You shed everything for it like you would your soiled and mud-soaked clothes.

In the beginning, Bikash was like a new intoxicating island in the map of her life. This was Anjali's first encounter of its kind. As though a hidden niche had been found within the familiar boundaries of the house. He had the expression of a small boy watching the rainbow, desperate to pluck a flower. His unheeding, blind frenzy had no common point with the small, measured steps of the adult world.

Anjali knew beauty in a different form, that did not come only with her art of adornment, but blossomed on its own by the morning sunlight.

But then moments after touching it she saw how it changed,

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transformed into something different, almost fearsome within minutes, like your own reflection in a asymmetrical mirror. A ferocious dwarf took over the child in him. No infatuation for rainbows; only greed written all over his face, the same greed-of-hunger of that worm that evening, and ugly, like the crooked, deformed flower which had looked so beautiful in its slender stalk!

Was this that final moment, that primordial dark time that was waiting for Anjali? There was no escaping that moment, no way of relief, for the worm multiplied into a hundred, and then into a million, and a million turned into trillions right before her eyes. They were all around her, over the boughs, the buds, the earth, clothes, her body. It engulfed everyone, Ajit, Munu, kitchen, Papa and Ma.

The moment did recede, but had left its permanent and indelible imprint. This is the final figure then, whose dark form she had been trying to visualize all these days. Whom she had dreaded like a hobgoblin.

She could see herself, in the horror and disbelief in the faces of the dear ones who came to visit her. Then she saw her face reflected in the stainless steel containers beside her bed. A shriek of horror turned mute behind her toungue.

The figure she had worshipped all life, is now one with the dark forms that were haunting her in nightmares. No more fear then, from anyone, anything.

The eyes were closed. No worry now.

The body had once been beautiful. It was now a grotesque corpse.

Translated from Oriya by the Author

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POETRY

Meena Kandasamy

Ekalavyan

This note comes as a consolation:

You can do a lot of things with your left hand. Besides, fascist Dronacharyas warrant left-handed treatment.

Also, you don't need your right thumb, to pull a trigger or to hurl a bomb.

The Flight of Birds

"a poem should be wordless as the flight of birds."

-Archibald Macleish, Ars Poetica.

birds don't sing in their flight

for them flying is a muse they compose mid-air weave agnostic verse

as they float over our meaningless mosques and churches and those patrolled international borders and other disputed sites

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

where the guns go bang bang bang all the time they swing over there losing their birdegos (ego is difficult to retain in mid-flight) wondering about and watching men plucking out and quashing the lives of other men and women and poor helpless children and they shed a birdtear or two from there a birdtear that is lost midway due to the heat of some explosion down below some crazy fanatical bomb detonating killing instantly the people and the city and the forests and even the pitiable babybirds who are yet to learn to fly they contemplate of writing poems about a bird's egg charring before even being boiled and scratch their beaks unsure if this is a metaphor or simile or some other poetic device.

o the birds have lots and lots and lots to write about o their writings will never be banned

they borrow freedom to write poems in the sky they come back pass it on to us

we take the song only brutally but at least we take the song

to take the poem
to unscramble the words from the song and to put it back again
as song
so spontaneously that it remains the poem and the song
to remember forever this refrain whose melody haunts us
and to hum that refrain which preserves our sanity
perhaps we need to fly

a trifle aimlessly like birds

or because we are humans six-sensed creatures with massive egos

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and massive superegos and massive egos on the ego and because of possessing gray matter we need to feel with our red hearts than think with some unlocatable mind

we need to look deeper

into ourselves into eyes

we need to lose ourselves

then and only then

the poems will come silent wordless as the flight of birds

A Breathless Counsel

curiosity will catch you dear for you are a writer and it is your license to startle the world with a hundred thousand words instead of a dazzling smile or those occasional winks and i don't want to probe for after all you are renouncing all the time and i don't want to stop you racing against life but i have been there and i have returned and i know what happens when it takes hold of a woman yes i know what happens then but i will not tell you the answers i have sealed my lips i have learnt how not to say what i must be saying somehow i don't want to be fledging you in security for what happens with all my parenting will only be a compromise darling child instead i let you free i want you to ask the questions i want you to prick and not polish your wounds i will let you to be hurt in the face of the world i want you to learn more than what you want to learn sometimes i feel i want you to get hurt badly hurt and bleed before the world and then i shall sit back and feel my work is done for once you have known what pain is then you shall know how to preserve the fringes of happiness i want you to be alone in the ravenous world where you never know what happens next just so that you will no longer find routine to be so

Meena Kandasamy / 101

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despicable and amidst that pervading fuzziness you shall long for an anchor for all your dreams only realizing much later that you are your safety you are your ultimate but till then you might screech and scream, but when you retain your temperament you will find that life will always lie waiting like an hungry beast and at each turn you take i wisk you learn the greater horrors and now i confess darling i want you hurt because i want to watch you fight and fight and fight i want you to pull together those moonbeams of hope i want you to throw precariously i want you to be living on the edge i want you to learn the thousand one ways in which you can melt the boundaries of saturation called death and the emptiness of life and the fidgetiness of what might be called love i want you to lose i want you to win but some day i want you to be free

from the series 'The Eighth Day of Creation'

Untitled-6

Technically, it is a torrential downpour.

You stand by the window watching the rain wash the world.

A small schoolboy comes running out of nowhere, drenched and dancing in oblivion.

And for the first time in your seventeen-year-old life you think of becoming a mother.

Untitled -7

Even chalk-dust has settled down.

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You prance about, always the last one to leave school because your home is just a stone's-throw away.

You linger. You look into empty classrooms expecting fairies and naughty gnomes to pop up. They might have stories to tell you, secrets to share.

One day you see Shamshed, all alone, only he doesn't see you watching him. One year your senior, a rank holder, orator-in-aspirated-Hindi, football player.

Shamshed, on all fours.
Shamshed, with thrown-away food.
Shamshed, swallowing discarded leftovers.

That day, you stopped staying late.

Nothing magical happens at school. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Untitled-17

Years roll by.

No longer the observer, you become an object.

You know you are a woman when other people deal with you along the outlines of your contours. It defines you, it defines them. It shuts you within a slender frame. Makes you fragile, delicate. . . . Anybody could break you, if they wanted to.

Like a trapped genie you seek to expand you strive to eat the world.... Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

But are always returned to the glass sealed safely to perdition.

The eyes that inspect you search for a studded ring on your fourth finger a sacred chain around your neck and even stoop down to explore if you wear toe-rings. The symbols of marriage.

When will the world know that if you have a man in your life he will be the starshine in your eyes, the colour in your skin, each of your breathless word which caresses the air? The man who taught you ten thousand ways to love would have caused plenty of changes. Yes, he will own your speech and silence and sudden grace....

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Niranjan Shrotriya

The Female Sarpanch

In post-Independent India it is no tale of eves-teasing nor any comment on rampant disparities regarding women's glorification either.

This is just a casual occurrence in some simple village beyond the reach of post-modernistic womens'-lib argumentation.

It is not even an event, in root of which is Ramdei—the female sarpanch

It is just an interlude about how a woman became the head of the village.

It was merely the result of a lottery take it just a case born of rapes, female molestation and a hazy constitution

O

It's nothing significant but a strange interlude of a female becoming a village sarpanch

Hence, whenever you visit her home find there Ramdei sometimes kneading the floor or patting up cow dung cakes or begetting children or filling hukkah

Sometimes relaxing under the sun to soothe the wounds that crack her back

She cannot come out of the threshold of her home nor is she allowed to enter the Panchayat hall for five year together in this village all went on smoothly—

rapes immolation molestation

So was it when a women ruled as P.M. for a decade and a half or so people said

It is nothing significant no need to pay heed to it.

This, basically is not a revolutionary saga about a mere woman's becoming the head of the village but merely an anecdote of a female becoming the sarpanch

Today in the wake of ensuing elections the women of the village pray to God for Ramdei's not becoming the sarpanch elect But men's praise about her knows no end.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha.

The Poem About the Sun

From the Far East, he comes as if kicked out by some show-soft babe like a red ball he comes and rambles through the court of heaven's yard

He penetrates inside the hearth conspires against the moist wood planks wages a war along with ambers

Afraid to stone-smashing hammer conceals its face amidst the clouds
Then stealthily peeps out on earth where the autumn has ripened the crops to the core

Losing its brilliance after mid-day borrows some brightness from the bulging shiny shins of the hill porters carrying the load

Thousands of the yellow flowers of the earth keep a watch on his activities and this disciplined flower-faced sun enters slowly the constantly rutted lane

When hungry, it stoops down to the sleeping mother earth and sucks the warm nectar from her breasts.

Arrogant of having enjoyed mother's milk once chided by the mother earth hides amidst the clouds for three months together Outcast from play by children of this earth roams long-faced during the winter

Now, it does not matter who rotates round whom but we would better accept this fact, that his six thousand degree Celsius heat he owes to the warmth of the dwellers of the earth.

He is no strange planet but the lad brought up on this very earth. See, the infant on the other end of the globe mistook it for a butterfly and caught it. The night prevailed.

ich

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha

The Daughter

(Three rhymes about the daughter)

I

The daughter is an ocean whatever you give her, she will return remember her or not she will drench you up to your emotional core concealing countless mysteries in her heart the daughter alone is the two-third part of our home.

II

When she lies tired, a-while and gazes at the roof of the house goes to sleep talking to the various shapes imprinted on the crude tiles of it

even when asleep, she is looking at that same roof her dreams revert against the roof all of a sudden she awakes doesn't even change her side, while sleeeping. The roof alone she stares at as if the roof is supported by her gaze alone.

III

One Vimla Chauhan is thinking about Lily Fernandez The other is worried for Radha Sharma Radha, who knows why Salma Qureshi is sad And Salma equally partakes Manjeet Kaur's grief

At this end of the town if your touch disturbs on on the other far end you'll startle another.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha. 108 / Indian Literature: 234

The Market Place

From the dry edges of the drought-stricken fields, a couple of helpless eyes

look at the skies, not sky at all but a network of microwaves Whether the monsoon will come smashing against them, or will it come from across the seven seas on this magnanimous earth?

The land is ours—but theirs the sky
The womb is ours—theirs the seeds
The manure is ours—theirs the dung hills
The crown is ours—theirs the head

Welcome all, all to this large-hearted earth Weeds—welcome to the fields Waves—welcome to our hearts and soul Newspapers—welcome to our literate hands Welcome words, come sounds come medicine, welcome diseases.

Come, this country of ours is but a bazaar It is only a petty-cheap affordable commerce Welcome CNN, STAR, BBC come and overpower us all

Welcome Internet
That is what a 'global village' means
That is where the
Alsatians of New York relish and consume
the crisp, oven-hot rotis
"Made in Delhi Bujurg"

Take our perpetual and naive concerns away from us, and keep us perplexed about what will happein to Tara now, or what turn will this narrative take?

Whether the commander will catch the murderer and when shall our Mihir come back alive?

And when the buzzer at KBC will strike?

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Weigh your strength
the gait of bamboo bullock-cart against
the flying pace of hot wheel car
the melody of Raag Deepak challenging Michael Jackson's
dazzling strains
the battle of local rough newspapers
against the colourful glaze of imported page
the snacks of Bikaner vis-a-vis
the soda of Pepsi salt
The filial affection of mother versus
packed, sealed tins.

In the dumb silent bloody Mahabharata the hurt, wounded warriors shall ask the large-hearted Yudhishthir. the cause of this fake truth of life and entering this very market/bazaar Kisna will feel remorse at his pocket-picked and shall loudly bemoan "Alas! I should have read the intentions and not the good."

Amidst the clamour caused by these untamed elephants an echo of a lisping child, by the side of the cart wheel will still be heard...

"Its crown in the North is Himalayas and feet reverently washed by the ocean Hind,"

There is no time for prayer but let us some ants discover.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha.

Fanne Khan, The Guide

Forty miles away from Agra, Fanne Khan, the guide is the native of this town of red stones located amidst streets.

The history lost in his white hair and wrinkled face makes a bye-way

The tourists follow him like a herd of ducks, Fanne Khan walks straight, like Akbar the emperor despite his bent, bowed backbone

In his invocation of mixed Hindi-Urdu-Hindi glides majestically the sixteenth century through the stairs of Fanne Khan, amidst the mob

His eyes once again shine through the shining swords drawn out of their sheaths during the second battle of Panipat in 1556

In 1564, the Hindus relieved from Jazia, the tax and in 1582 Deen-i-Ilahi prevailed narrating all this, the eyes of Fanne Khan gave the message of Suleh-E-Kul

This city, founded in 1571
not a city, but a royal, innocent, pious dream
a specimen of Iranian-Mughal-Indian architecture
"The very motive behind this Fanne Khan's being the guide"
whisper the old sires at leisure.
"This is Deewan-E-Aam" echoes the old but bold voice still
"This high seat of justice surrounded by the rectangular
arched corridors"

On it sat Akbar the Great, the compassionate king suddenly the voice of Fanne Khan chide the tourists for some crude comment The choric laughter subsides "Silence! the court is in session."

"And this Deewan-E-Khas"

on a high plinth of red stone, the edifice square
where the emperor learnt the truth of all religions
very skilfully could Fanne Khan conceal

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
the bitter reminiscences that his eyes reveal
He looks like an angelic form in blanched robe and beard.

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Ti

This is Panchmahal, the abode of queens where the queens sat viewing the kingdom's Durbar making chapatis at home
The face of Jamalo Begum dawns from the veil supported by tender grip of teeth with pride of a dame who reared two young sons and with grief of losing two dear ones
Like kaleidoscope all passes into Fanne Khan's mind

This is the palace of Birbal smart, witty with presence of mind looking like Altaf my first cousin who, these days lives in Pakistan the voice of Fanne Khan choked with grief

winds itself up hight at Darwaza Buland A symbol of victory over Khans, of bold intent hundred and thirty four feet high fusion of art of India and Iran the psalms of thrilled ecstasy can be read on Fanne Khan's exhausted countenance

"This then, my Lords, Fatehpur Sikri that never was and could never be
It's poetry in marble carved by Persian imagination and Indian craftsmanship Long live the beauties of this Yamuna, Gangetic stream" wishing thus, Fanne Khan glanced at the pigeons sitting high on domes, white leaving the tourists at Saleem Chishti's tomb to fulfil their cherished well-being

The tourists return towards their bus praising the arches, galleries and windows frescoed and above all Fanne Khan's enthralling tongue which renders the place still more beautiful Fanne Khan lives the sixteenth century so well

knows not much about history,
"It does not matter if the facts are wrong
but how we present them is all that matters."

d.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha



Nonda Chatterjee

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What Was That Word, Again ...?

Coming, I heard your call, but what was that word? That elusive conglomeration of sounds
Which seemed to say what I wanted to say?

It's gone, gone with the fragrance of the jasmine That wafted through the window, and, yes, coming, I know the children have to get to school, but...

The scent took me back twenty years to the room Patterned in black and white marble, the yellow jasmine, The dappling of lacy shadows on the warm brick,

To spilt ink on an ancient table covered in green baize, My aunt's severely-tried patience and my uncle's tolerance, My cousin s conspiratorial smile...

The vegetables are over-cooked, breakfast is a mess, I know, I'm impossibly late for my well-paid job, and, They will throw me out one day, you have said so, not once.

But how can I go till I have captured the sounds that Were Life, twenty years ago, The purple Jacaranda that matched the dear one's purple pain,

The sunshine of her glance when I went home, The soldier, shouldering all with a smile that never faltered, The little girl, hair bobbing,

Skating in and out of her enchanted world,

Sharing her own pain with her imagined twin, and Making others laugh with her nonsense...

How does one articulate the complete inadequacy To deal with life, the inability to assuage, to alleviate, To expiate a severe lapse, to communicate in words,

To those who are no more, and those who are? Oh God, I know I'm hopelessly behind with everything, But, what was that word, again?

Epilogue

once.

pain,

ed,

They cut me down but I leaped up high, I told them I would never, never die. The cat has nine lives but I have ten. This is my message for mice and men-

They put me in the ground, I came out as a tree, They burnt me in the fire, I came out as Sree, They drowned me in the water, I came out as the sun, They threw me in the sky, as the moon I shone!

They cut me into pieces and they scattered my parts; These fell on the earth and turned into hearts. Each heart had a voice and a tongue to match; I spoke through them but there was none to catch!

They made me the plaything of king, wight and fool; They took my body and made it a tool To lure their enemies, placate their friends, To further their complex and material ends.

They forgot that I am fire, air and earth. They forgot that I hold the nuptery of birth. They forgot my roles as mother, daughter, wife. They forgot that without me there is no life!

The war will continue till day meets night, Till body meets soul, till vision meets sight,

Nonda Chatterjee / 115

Till purush and prakriti stop looking askance And, as equals, take their place in the cosmic dance.

So awake and take heed of my battle-cry: They can kill me but I will never, never die... For, eternally reborn, I will soar up high, Permeate every atom of earth and sky!

Poetry is Not...

Poetry is not gimmickry, gimcrack and false, Nor words artificially fashioned with artifice, Not pain, nor joy, nor 'I' Aiming to strike aimless, cynical chords, Nor deliberately, intellectually, obscure, Hoping to obfuscate rather than illumine The death of the soul....

Look for poetry in the flight of birds
Searching for sanctuary in killing-fields,
Trees in cities, leafing and flowering
Through the grime that chokes them,
Droplets of water on the lashes of a dark girl bathing
In a forbidden, white pool,
A song long forgotten that haunts the memory,
An old woman's tears for the bus she missed to the other side...

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Wring the living soul, fashion it in life's blood, And you may find...

Priya Sarukkai Chabria

Secret Chamber

The wooden cupboard with double-door mirrors holds my image, pentimenti pressed into its face, into

its ground glass, into its mercury-lined back. It has known me since I was four. Often, I've thought these images might spill

as shimmering shadows on ancestral floors and lace my ankles to their lips. Once, snared by loss

I had curled within the cupboard's darkness, breathing in its smell, touching its grain. That's when I found

the secret chamber—
in which to hide remembrance.
I was eleven: my pet had died

quarantined in a distemper ward that quaked with light. I said goodbye

to his shape, to his tongue, to his weight. Lifting his small shadow

curled around my heart

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I had buried it here. Last night my hands remembered the chamber.

Within lay dog hair in cellophane wraps, neatly folded in a time trap.

I wonder

if the girl with sad curious hands visits me through bends of time. Or do I slip back into her as a series of reflections?

In the wormhole of life, where lies the secret chamber? In the past or the present?

Which is more real, and which, more reflection?

Falling

-for Varun Sahni

I sit wide-eyed and unseeing as his voice tells me of his work, of the everyday wonders in physics that bend

the imagination to a site near grace. We range across ten-dimensional space

into dark energy, scurry through wormholes to emerge into the quantum world, into minute degrees of discretion.

Here's a narrative:
Around each nucleus electrons orbit,

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each a senseless circling in its own ambit, each electron separated

from the next by a quantum—that is both space and energy field. (So far so good. He's trying hard to communicate over lemon tea, and I'm getting it.) Next instant—

collision. (Drama on a subatomic scale.) Another atom bombards the one we were discussing. A lowly electron flies off the loop, hitting

a higher sphere, shooting into the outer margins of energized third or fourth quantum hoops. But the electron that's kicked up

wants to fall, he says, fall back to its low energy, close-to-the-centre place. (Don't we wish to return, I think, to sink into darkness; descend, give up the fight?) But as it falls

the electron sheds a wake of light.

In this reality fall is grace. I weep into my hands; he looks bemused, then nods.

Quantum physics is a strangely luminous space.

from Poems from Babylon and Persia, 2006: Salma, pi-dog of Baghdad

Americans are kind. They leave blood on the streets for us to lick, and morsels of human flesh

stuck to charred clothing.

No

ne

They return us to our ancestors: Wolves.

Blue Vase

—for Amma

Glazed turquoise blue, a colour so intense you knew it was turned in a place far from water, under desert skies. My mother brought it home and unwrapped its blue shape: Bowl-bottomed, thick-necked, wide-mouthed. It was unique; but beyond that, nothing special.

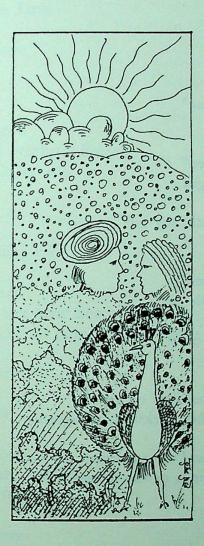
Hummingbird blue, gem blue, yet large and coarse, it coursed through the phosphorescent dreams of my childhood and those of a family fragmenting. Once, it held sunflowers in our midst. Once my sister almost broke it—playing ball in the hall.

Our eyes filled with it. At day so bright and lonely it silenced the sea outside our home; its blues pooled at night, that's when it shrank like a stone. It sat on a walnut sideboard that now sits, I think, in my father's new house.

They left, each one of them, like rivers seeking beds. I bored a hole into its clay, thinking it should hold more light to shoo the darkness from that sun-filled place. I turned it into a lamp stand, permanently capped. It glowed artificially all day, all night.

Then I too packed, and moved, and have packed and moved six times since. Somewhere I lost its shade. Or did it loosen and roll away one day—the bulb, the holder and the cone of turquoise jute?

Now the blue vase holds neither flowers nor light. But air—that drains through the hole at its base, and brims over its open rim.



Sanjukta Dasgupta

The Art of Lying

"What is a lie" Asked the little girl

"It is that which is not" Said her sad mother

"Can't catch a lie, then" Queried the restless girl

"But they lie like truth, my girl" Replied her mother

"Who are they-tell me" Asked the excited little one

"They look like any of us" Smiled the woman-

"Presidents, priests, peddlers of hope Philanderers, confidence tricksters, pedagogues

The good, bad and mad are entwined Good hearts, ugly minds or the reverse"

"I am scared mother" Said the little girl

"why did you bring me to such a world Now I'll have to suffer like you and others I'll h How

"Life You

Said As he

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> When life is hurt

> When mesm satyri

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Wher treach like s Yet, I'll have to suffer if I love and trust How can I live if I can't trust?"

"Life is a school with endless classrooms You will learn as you live"

Said her sad but sure mother As her tears fell like dew, on the leaves of the book of life.

Where There is No Love

Where there is no love stretches a desert oasis-free

Where there is no love alluring boutique of synthetic flowers seductive dead plastic for sale

Where there is no love life is a playground hurt is a lethal hurtling ball

Where there is no love mesmeric falsehood like scaly hoods of cobras satyric leer and chuckle of slippery rattle snakes

Where there is no love carelessness terrifies like guns in Baghdad

Where there is no love it's a monotone of me and I magnum opus of Narcissus

Where there is no love. treacherous lies and tricks torment like sharp thorns under the bare feet Yet, somewhere, if there is love

a crucified bird wings the lively air a resurrected Christ, or invincible Phoenix

Saliva

Never before had such a viscous and vitriolic fluid flowed from lolling tongues
Fortune hunters panted in lascivious heat
History sat up traumatized
Art and artifice nonpareil
Covetousness as never before
Such cruel, scheming crusader's zeal such brazen equivocation
was never recorded in the tragic files of Time.

Fair and Foul, Good and Evil
God and Devil
in an explosive mesh of chaos
saliva cascaded down
scorching the earth where it fell
Streams of blood flowed into the ancient rivers
Charred roses stared petrified in the spring gardens
Desire drooled for the welling oil in that raped terrain.

Suddenly every threatened green blade of grass a lethal knife blade every boulder in the desert a fist of fury
Till the saliva dried up the tongues hung out like fattened, drunken leeches dripping blood.

My Poems

My poems, my poems
Is that a narcissistic jingle
Is it the title of my new book
Is it a folder name

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or th chair Or the name of countless files within a very pale yellow folder untouchable, except for some pats on the screen—to see but not to hold unless emitted through the jaws of the printer.

My poems
are like singing birds on wing
exploring the overarching azure lawns
My poems
sometimes pop into the cobalt blue
of the evening sea on the Orissa coast
only to pop up again next dawn
glistening and drenched in orange-red

My poems
linger like a drop of dew
in the corner of weary eyes
for those cold in the sun's embrace
My poems
rain like the rays of the moon
ever elusive like a deer at play
My poems
can be crutches for a gipsy
on a journey to nowhere

My poem is a teardrop congealed concealed like a drop of pearl within the moist sun-shy oyster Pried open it becomes just a poem Texture and structure just rhetoric in prosodic chains or the more rigorous shackles—chained free verse awaiting liberation.

As the words reach the world spinning in wild wonder whirling through the planet touching a heart caressing a mind
coaxing a nod
a flutter of butterfly wings
somewhere, anywhere
links in an invisible chain
that is after all invincible
And then my poems
no longer remain just mine.

Illusions

No, don't call me again to that fiendish feast of tandooried dreams
The teasing turns of the rotisserie as the impaled become more succulent in seconds
Sizzlers crackling over slow fires
The turning of the spikes
The spluttering of fire as drops of melting fat make flames knife through the air Wild, sharp stutters of fiery rage Maggots of passion to dust of dreams inevitably.

Rain and I

Last night I heard the rain dancing on my roof top humming a tune as it tap-danced on the concrete floor I had to see the rain that woke me from my possible sleep

I stretched out my arms Raining jets of water

drenched me like
no hi-tech shower can ever do
Where are the rain-heavy dark clouds
the inky sky and the streaking silver flashes
in dazzling psychedelic designs
and the rumbling of thunderous drums
within the strict space of a swanky bathroom?

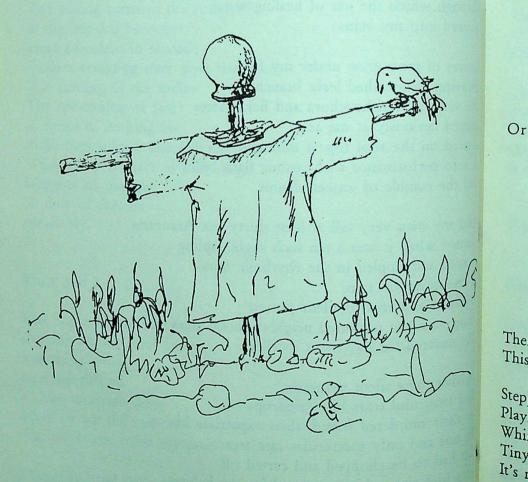
Rain and I
in a monsoon re-union
danced and sang
in an intimate soaking togetherness
The roof became a lush green field
The midnight blue sky
a perforated canopy
through which the jets of healing water
poured into my veins

Leaves of grass grew under my feet Swaying rain-washed leafy branches the very tall Krishnachura and Bakul trees peeped curiously at me as I danced on the roof top at midnight A solo performance with cosmic flash bulbs and the rumble of unseen drums

And my own very tall at least thirty-feet Araucaria planted when it was a ten inch slight sapling swayed and rippled in the rhythmic music of the monsoon rain
It joined a chorus of silent protest along with the neglected neighbourhood trees
The uncared for pavement dwellers

together these silent witnesses shed mournful tears like raindrops for their murdered friend, their expatriate kin the one and only spectacular rain tree that had to be chopped and carted off for a high-rise, a high powered human habitat

Rain and I sang a dirge for the beautiful dumb rain tree that couldn't scream as it was killed We of course were struck dumb too for it was a tree on someone else's private property favoured or liquidated in one fell stroke like a dependent wife!



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Sirpi Balasubramaniam

River in a Hamlet

Wherefrom it flows This river?

Smashing
Silence of Mountains?
Impairing
Robes of clouds?
Seeping out
Babbles of woods

Or

From me?
Opening
Fount-eyes of my soul
Raising
Hair-thrills on my chest
Scenting
Flowers and grass in my veins
Submerging
My entire "Self"
Wholly dissolving me

Therefrom it flows This river.

Stepping on a moving serpent Playing flute by lips Whirling and dancing Tiny 'Krishnas' are here too It's my 'Yamuna.'



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Pre-yards of Harishchandra
To lie on eternal rest
Burnt remains of the dead
Laid sacred in placenta pot
Stored within sodden wombs
Are with this river too
It's my 'Ganga'1...

Not on war with Neighbour state Smoothly runs this brook It is my Cauveri

This Salty river meets
With another that of milk
It's my life's salt and
So is my mother's breast-milk
Unread histories and
Unfinished 'memoirs'
All in its shores...

Moulding rocks into
Sculpture
Is it's trait
In subtlety these waves are
Moving paintings during day;
By night,
Foot-rings dancing to
Tunes of Nadaswara
Of yonder breeze.

Yourself a feed Your fish is also food I too yearn to be Provender to thee

A screwpine mat, this is I lingered thereupon.

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^{1.} A water game repeating the act of climbing on one's shoulder and juiling into water, one after another, by a group of persons

A mirror, I saw my face 'Veena' of my love.
Honeymoon suite
Of my solitude.
Courtyard of my sighs

Massive tear dropping out Of its own weight

Silvery wrapper Of my thoughts Drain of my woes Ocean of my joys

It's my blue blood Umblical cord Of my first poem Edict of my last command

That whimpering silence
Between letters
Of this mighty verse
that strolls upon shoulders of 'Time'
Is me.

Translated from Tamil by A.Abdul Jaleel

Rock Craft

Over rocks, This river brawls on and on Playing 'green horse game.'1

Is this river
A sister to Thungabhadra
Of Humpi town
Who, with love
Lay embraced to
The stones on its shores?

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Sirpi Balasubramaniam / 131

the sudden end. Udhab Aja, leaving his herd in the fields to fend for itself, had come running. At the sight of his friend's lifeless body, he did not weep. Instead, he commented, "Sala (an affectionate expression) lived a pampered life. And now see he has also died a pampered death! I am left alone here to wallow in the dung of my herd or my own faeces." And to everyone's amazement he had laughed a dry cynical laugh at his own words before sounding a warning to my father-in-law. Said he, "Don't you be in a hurry to offer the final Sradha (rites for salvation of the departed soul) at Gaya for him. Wait till my death; or else his liberated soul would give me the slip again and go wandering some world else. I would be left hanging on to the tail of Yamaraja's (God of Death) buffalo looking for him all eternity."

It seems that Udhab Aja's words were prophetic. For close to a week now he has been lying facedown, unable to eat or drink, at times running temperature of 104 to 105 degrees. The wallowing-in-faeces condition that he spoke about could be fast approaching. In Udhab Aja's case though, one could never be too sure. Not that, he has been totally spared the usual wear and tear of the aging process. Many of the signs are already there: swollen eyelids with greying eyelashes overhang the eyes, almost covering them wholly; tufts of white hair peep out of the ears and the nostrils; the once firm cheeks hang loosely on both sides and the random missing teeth appear like a line of ugly-looking uneven holes. A lifetime of movement in slush and mud has eroded large chunks of his soles and the shrivelled toes have turned gnarled and knotty. The nails have lost their sheen or are affected by torn shreds of skin beside them. The torso though still holds firm and the fierce tiger-like face still remains awesome.

Last evening, Aja's daughter-in-law spoke to my mother-in-law. Amidst sobs she told her, "For the good of all of us the old man should die. You know, if he lies dying for long we will not be in a position to nurse him. After all, he will have to be washed and towelled after each call of nature and it will be almost impossible for us to handle such lump of a man, by ourselves. Believe me, his arms even now feel like stone-pestles."

And the daughter-in-law's daughter-in-law who was around joined to improve the description. "I have heard it said that he could consume and digest two seers (one seer equals about two pounds) of buffalo milk at one go. You understate when you say that his arms are like stone pestles. In think, lifting them would give the feel of handling a pair of iron-clubs, no less!"

The mother and her daughter-in-law are used to such cracks

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between themselves. Although spoken in a lighter vein the account truly nails the expected nursing snags that the women of the family would face with a hulking man like Udhab Aja. Perhaps, it would be for the good of all concerned if he passes away gracefully and early too. Besides, if the doctor's forecast of possible insanity or paralysis really comes true, the situation would simply be unmanageable. Udhab Aja's seventy year old wife used to look after him until recently; the morning tea, the lunch, the cold-weather mustard oil-garlic massage, were all attended to by the old woman painstakingly even if she had to creep and crawl because of her own infirmity. But finally she had given in to her own inadequacy for the chores and the daughters-inlaw had taken over. But Aja's present illness has again brought her back to his bed side, although everyone knows that her presence is only token. Since the old man is indifferent about eating, the problem of cleaning him has not arisen so far. The daughters who have come visiting, lend their hands in the nursing, but eventually they will leave for their in-law's places and in case of a prolonged illness like insanity or paralysis, the entire burden will be on the daughters-in-law who also work and contribute to the family earnings. The family's financial condition is not good and even sick children go unattended. In such a situation, a bedridden eighty-year-old will simply be a drag on the

Although in the course of talk on the illness all these anxieties get aired, in our heart of hearts we somehow find it hard to accept that Udhab Aja is not likely to be seen around any more. For a long time now he has almost become a phenomenon in the lifecycle of the community; the vermillioned rock-face which compels obeisance and assures protection. This image of Udhab Aja also takes me back in time to my own childhood and my own grandfather who too had been for us a venerated emblem and at the same time a source of love and assurance. Ever since he retired from buffalo-herding, Udhab Aja mostly stays at home. His house is situated two hundred yards from our house. He sits there, all day long, leaning against the wall abutting the door. The indelible oily smudge created by his castor-oil-treated hair on the wall is a permanent reminder of Aja's presence there. He is never alone; a crowd of seven to eight children from the village usually surround him. These, in addition to the tiny tots from his own family ranging in age from six months to three years, who end up on his lap. All eagerly listen to the many stories he has to tell: of kings and queens, of rich sea-faring traders and their consorts. Udhab Aja reminds me of my own grandfather in the role of a loving authority

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who too regaled us with many such stories or taught us how to swim or made us ride make-believe, the mythical winged-horse (Pakhiraj) when in reality he had us seated on the back of a buffalo!

The setting in which Udhab Aja, our venerated emblem, has installed himself has been in place for the last ten to twelve years. A corner of the front verandah has been curtained off with gunny sheets to serve as dining space during the summer. During the rains and winter the gunny sheets are supplemented by partition screens made out of bamboo or coconut leaves. The space is also used as a bedroom and has practically been the living quarters of Udhab Aja since the days his family grew and the daughter-in-law, grand-daughter-in-law and the grand children filled up whatever little space the house offered. Earlier, may be twenty years ago, his wife had moved to the Dhenkisal (a room set apart for paddy pounding) in the backyard. It is a small, stuffy room without windows and it also serves as the lumberroom crowded with bamboo baskets, bundles of old clothes and other household rejects. Udhab Aja had shifted to his new living quarters later than she. Prior to the change he had been occupying the inner verandah. At the onset of the present illness the husband and wife had thus been living at opposite ends of the house; the man occupied the front verandah braving the sun, the wind and the chill and the woman lived in the backyard effectively sealed off from the sun, rain and the winter in the close confines of her room. Since the recent illness, they have been put together in the inner room vacated by the younger son and his wife. Grandma always keeps vigil at the foot of the bed. Most of the time Udhab Aja remains in a sort of daze. During the occasional moments of wakefulness he does not show any sign of recognition for the wife. When she tries to feed him with milk or candy water he shakes his head in refusal and turns his face away. Grandma has ceased weeping. Instead, she has been seized by an impotent restlessness. One moment she would be seen closely hugging Aja's legs and the next she would be seen thrashing about the floor around his bed with both her palms in desperation. In such a mental state she too needs watching and nursing. Only the other day, in an unwatched moment she knocked her head on something and got a swell but has been doggedly refusing to get massaged with castor-oil.

Last evening I had been to Udhab Aja's place. I found Aja asleep and grandma cold-sponging his forehead. For fear of disturbing them I instantly withdrew from the room. Even as I crossed the doorsill I ran into aunty, the younger daughter of Udhab Aja. As an opening for conversation I asked her whether Udhab Aja had improved some-

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what and had started taking his food. Aunty did not answer my question. She ignored my presence and with a disapproving cluck entered into a sort of aside not for me alone but for the world at large. "Chhee, Chhee (an expression of derision)! What a shame! And at his age too! He must be hiding his face for shame; how can he think of food or drink? We had come rushing, hearing of his illness and did not have the faintest hint of the occurrence here. Your uncle has returned home, suitably briefed about the goings-on here. My in-laws' family will now have a story, to taunt me throughout life. And I shall have to hang my head in shame for all times to come."

I could not help asking her, "Even if you had known the facts,

could you have avoided seeing your dying father?"

Aunty had noticeably widened her nostrils with sobs and hatred and chose to remain silent.

I was under the impression that the matter had been treated as closed by all concerned on that very fateful day or at best the next and the concern and anxiety about Aja's health would automatically have elbowed out the memory of the unfortunate incident. But no! I found that, not to speak of outsiders, even close family members have found in it an excuse for expressing righteous indignation. I am afraid whether the old man would be able to escape the dock, even after his death?

And, what was the matter? At around two o' clock that fateful night, grandma had suddenly given a fearful yell from her room: "O

O! O! He is killing me! The Thief! The Thief!"

It had been a fullmoon night but the sky was cloudy and there was also a drizzle. The combination of the cloud, the moonlight and the occasional lightning had created a light and shadow effect which made things visible, if not distinct, and also brought about a creepy feeling. We, like many of our neighbours, had retired to the safety and cosiness of our warm beds. Because of the feebleness of grandma's voice her call 'Thief, Thief' would ordinarily have gone unheard. But as chance would have it, the grand-daughter-in-law of the house had just woken up to breastfeed her infant son. She acted the sensor; received the oldwoman's feeble call; amplified it with her youthful voice; roused her husband from bed; and then, what with the lighting of lanterns, of running for sticks and the resultant hullabaloo, awakened the entire neighbourhood. The focal point of all attention had been grandma's room from where the alarm had been sounded. Udhab Aja was found lying face down on the floor and his wife stood shaking with fear beside him. Grandma is reported to have confided to her grand-daughter-inlaw, "My! My! I believe a ghost it was that pinned me down....a ghost!"

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The happening had immediately attracted commentators. The youngest grandson, the one who had taken four chances to clear his matriculation examination and had recently managed to get admitted to the local college, shot a volley of obscenities at Aja. I had taken him as a withdrawn sort of fellow who walked the streets with his face chastely down. The only time I had seen him run about on errands, called for or not, was during the annual staging of the village drama. But on that day, the dirty words he used embarrassed us into silence and hasty retreat.

The next day the entire village had lapped up the story of the shameless conduct of Udhab Aja. Conferences were held on age-barred sexuality; and the news spread. Even Aja's youngest brother-in-law who lives in my parents' village and is deaf, had been quickly and loudly briefed. He came rushing in a trolley-rickshaw and arrived at lunch time to counsel his brother-in-law on the art of graceful ageing. He instructed his senior, "Brother dear! We are not getting any younger by the day. It is time now for us to think of the other world, time to free ourselves from worldly trappings and time to concentrate on God, in thought and in speech. This craving for women and gold is an illusion; they are poison, deadly poison, brother! Dust we are and unto dust we shall return. You should think only of God, brother. Falling a prey to the lure of the flesh, at this ripe age when your own children have grown to manhood and woman-hood is sinful and would certainly invite censure and social outrage."

The censure and social outrage had not been long in coming. A snide comment here, a meaningful smile there and an expressive gesture elsewhere had kept the village feverishly busy for quite sometime after the event. Rama Nanda had wise-cracked, "Chilli gets hotter as it ripens." Uncle Mahapatra had recalled the gossip he had heard in his childhood. The story was that Udhab Behera in his youth had been quite a playboy. He used to take his herd of buffaloes to the other bank of the river for grazing and on his way back in the evenings rolled and romped merrily with the girls who worked in the fields. Biswal uncle in an attempt to spice the story, had added that all this fun had cost him only pitcherfuls of buffalo milk, no more!

The women of the village had discussed among themselves that the old man was born under the zodiac sign Gemini and therefore, fawned upon his wife. Come the rains and the man would gather wild Kia flowers and hang them above his bed. On his trips to the Hat (market place) he would never miss making a variety of purchases for the wife: candies and other goodies; ribbons, talcum powder and fancy

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vermillion cases. They also remembered that Udhab Behera had never been known to spend a night outside his home; he had always made it a point to return home even if it meant battling a river in spate or the inky darkness of a newmoon night or a raging storm. And yes, I recall now that our own Charu Nani had joined in, with a piece of scandalising data about the couple's perception of conjugal life. She informed the assembled company that the pair did not observe any of the accepted taboos; for them Thursdays, newmoon-days and Sankrantis (first day of the month) were like anyother day in the almanac. Two other comments were also memorable. One pitied the oldman that his wife, a patient of rheumatic fever since her unmarried days, had now become a chronic case and could not be expected to keep up her performance. The other condoned Aja's departure from accepted norms of conduct on the ground that such freak behaviour was usual before the end and old men, like children, should not be held accountable for their conduct! Misgivings were also voiced that some of us may have to pass through such a phase in the fullness of time.

Almost every household in the village had discussed the event; in Aja's own household there were strong and sharp words; the old man though, had showed no reaction. The youngest grandson had charged, "What were you doing in that room, honoured Sir? What work did you have with the old lady at that hour of the night?" Aja had merely gaped at him with an uncomprehending bovine look. The following day Aja had the rigor and then the fever with a raging temperature which made his body almost like a hot-oven. And he has been down since then without food and water.

After about a fortnight of regular treatment, Udhab Aja has been able to overcome his illness. At one point of time, anticipating the worst, preparation for his obsequies had already been set afoot. Ganga-water and Nirmalya (dried rice) of Lord Jagannath had already been administered and his eldest son had even set apart a bag of paddy for conversion to parched rice required for the ceremonies. But Aja survived; the survival was a wonder, but he did overcome the crisis.

However, the occurrence, the gloss on the occurrence by people around him and the spell of illness following it have brought about a great change in Aja's life. Udhab Aja is a changed man now. He is alive in the sense that there are no visible signs of disease and the boneframe holds; but the pith and substance of the man is lost; lost to the unalloyed image of the acceptable oldman.

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Earlier, one would find this jovial man always in the company of children, keeping them glued to himself by the vast reportoire of stories, ranging from kings to cabbages. The children listened to him with great fascination even as they watched Aja knead and blend tobacco and lime in the hollow of his palm during pauses taken for the purpose. Then Aja would chuck the blended mixture into his mouth, allow it to melt for a moment and then start sucking the juice. Refreshed, he would look around his young audience and with a flourish announce that the recipe for his chewing tobbaco was the same as the recipe for the tobacco chewed by the Gajapati king of Orissa. The tale would then be resumed. That was Udhab Aja; vivacious, ebullient and full of life.

But the transformed Aja is almost mute. He spends his days sleeping or occasionally visiting the river bank with the help of his walking-stick. There, beneath the shadow of the leafy overhanging boughs of the ancient banyan tree, he leans against the trunk and breaks into snatches of folk Oriya songs of renunciation:

O my dried bones, Don't you tire yourself with yearning For this world of illusion

or alternatively parrots the well-known lines from the Manobodh. Chautisa (a didactic book of poetry) which bring out the futility of all mundane possessions and worldly relations:

All that you have amassed,
All whom you call your own
Will be of no avail.
When the breath leaves the body
They will call you a ghost.
Your women will get spells cast
To shield their precious bodies from you;
And the family will assemble
To cleanse itself
From the defilement by your death.

I know for sure that Aja will never again be his old self nor will he ever be able to escape the encircling grey of renunciation and entithe other circle of greenery, of beauty and of the fullness of living the state of t

Aja no longer dreams. There was a time when he luxuriated dreams; the scintillating starry dreams of the nights and the dreams of the days. Under the canopy of dreams he got reliable to the days.

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company ortoire of ed to him and blend taken for e into his the juice, and with a sthe same of Orissa, vivacious,

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from the scorching realities of life. The dreams had been scenic and peopled; as when he would see the vision of the girl (Ghana Behera's daughter) with the green sari tending her cattle on the bank of the flooded river and fancy her as a Teeha (blue jay). The vision would swiftly fade and in its place would come another, this time a procession of scenes: a literate grandson who lives in a house with an asbestos roof; a successful great-grand-son who rears a large herd of buffaloes, gets dowry of a big milch buffalo and on the wedding platform proudly recounts before the priest the line of his ancestry, including the name of Udhab Charan Behera his great-grand-father, the picture of an anxious couple carrying a fevered child to a Kabiraj (village physician) ten miles away; of a caring husband taking measure of the ailing wife's temperature in a wintry night or the profile of a grand-father trying to spot the group of his own grand children playing in the moonlight.

At the core of Aja's being was a spring of life which flowed and flooded everything around him; his friends, his herd, the children, his wife, the mist and dew in the county side, the flowing river-water, the stars in the sky, the memory of a beautiful distant temple and the green luxuriant grass of the grazing fields. Aja's affection was all-embracing; an intense yearning for togetherness and for protecting all that he loved. On that creepy night of the occurrence, he had been shocked to stupefication at his own grandson accusing him of indecent conduct, when he only had had a sudden urge to give company and extend his protective arms to his ageing wife. During the following period of illness and recovery the man's self-doubt had shaken him empty till he meekly surrendered to conformity, to the conventionally accepted image of an old man.

Aja has ceased taking interest in the life around him. He no longer enthuses from his verandah the *Kabadi* players in the village alley and the sight of his weeping great-grandson does not draw any response from him. And his eyes appear above the scenes like a pair of unseeing glassballs.

Translated from Oriya by Alekh Kumar Patnaik

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The Golden Fish

Jagdish Mohanty

It was dusk by the time we reached Chandipur. A sudden cloud burst had barred our way. On the wayside was stretched out the weekly village market. For a distance, the road heading towards the Missile Testing Centre pulled us magically. No sooner did Pupun free himself from the hypnotic lure than he was stopped by a herd of deer.

At the shore, it seemed as if the sea had turned its back in a sulking mood. Archana was of course not thrilled. There is opulence in the sea at Puri. Solemnity at Gopalpur and fearful solitude at Konarka's Chandrabhaga. The sea at Chandipur was different from all these. A rustic beauty in a fashion show, you might say!



Beneath our feet, there are terrified crabs! Scurrying for dear lives, frantically they dive into the sand for cover, startling Pupun. Is the crab a vegetarian or meat eater? Pupun who got 98% marks in the examination of class three and secured third position does not quite know the answer. Do I have the answer? There are so many mysteries that I do not know: man's birth and death, the many universes like our own. Clearly there is a lot that I know nothing about!

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Archana called out: "Pupun, let's go and touch the waves!"

"Yes go and hug them!" urged the tourists. Soon the sea was going to recede two or three kilometres. Scared, Pupun said in a desperate act of self-assurance: "There Is no crab here!"

"It will do you no harm Pupun!"

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"Crab eats meat. It's a man-eater!" After all, man dies by the sting of a scorpion!"

"Well, crab and scorpion are not one and the same; you know!

The crab certainly does not eat men."

"Of course it does!"

"Take my word Pupun! My experience of forty long years!" I

said, "Believe me, the crab does not eat men!"

Pupun's eyes showed signs of disbelief. The shore at Chandipur was gradually receding. Archana called out: Come on Pupun, come and touch the waves!

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Why are you so scared, my son! How can you secure life from fire, water, air, accidents and death? Listen, life can never be transient! Fire cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, air cannot blow it! Only in the hands of an assassin, do we finally die! Offer your salutation to him! Not to the fire, water or the air! Roll life like a ball! Let it roll on the hard soil, dry grass, thorn and the rocks! And then, you will see that you have gone ahead my boy! Or else, you will find yourself forever standing still!

公 公 公

Pupun did not proceed further. He could not believe that we had taken up fear as the dress of custom. He could not remove the dress. And yet, his whole life would be spent in the stifling heat.

I screamed: "Go Pupun, go! Go to the Sea."

Pupun did not move. He released his defiant hand from my trusting fist. I shook in anger. Landing a big blow on his back, I yelled: "Go to the sea, you little coward!"

Hearing my scream, two tourists turned back. The girl singing Rabindra Sangeet abruptly stopped. The sea got scared and receded a few steps. Archana moved forward and taking Pupun in her lap, remonstrated: "Just, what do you think you are doing? If you insult the child before all, don't you think he will develop a complex!"

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Pupun's birth had completely changed my world. Stepping out of the operation theatre of the Nursing Home, the nurse had let me hold the newborn baby. With him snuggled between my two palms, I had

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entered into a strange new world that recognized no distinction between obscenity and propriety. Only nudity made for beauty here. Till yesterday, the woman who concealed her prized possessions inside her blouse, now felt free to acknowledge her motherhood in public. Before me, there lay an aged world. Holding the cherubic hands, I had stepped into that world that day, precisely at twenty minutes past ten A.M.! To be sure, I have always been a contented and successful man. There was no shame of South Africa in me! No problem of general election! Nobel Prize, Jnanpith or Arjuna Award! There was no 21st Century, radio activity, future of man, communal riots, fascist politics, extremism, price rise or dearness allowance. Absolutely nothing!— Only Archana for myself and the four walls around us!

And inside?

Well, sofa, T.V., dining table, glass, almirah, carpet, cooler for the heat of summer and room heater and geyser for the cold season. Also, there was mixie, hot pack, Banarasi saree, coat, suit, expensive quartz watches, a scooter—and Archana's growing waist line.

At that moment, Pupun was our only achievement. Three years after our marriage, every one near and far, the in-laws as well as well our own people—meaning the whole society—had become obsessed with a single thought: Why was there no Pupun in our life! As it is, Archana had irregular periods. Before her sanguine encounter every time, she used to dream that Pupun had come in to her womb. And yet, there had been no sign of Pupun. Only a bloody coldness!

I had little shame or guilt as to why there was no Pupun in our life, much as Archana forever agonized on this account. We had a good bunglow and scooter. There was jewellery in the bank's locker. And we had status and social prestige. Only, there was no Pupun! That did not seem to matter, at any rate to me! However, Archana's opinion was just the opposite: that in every one's life there had to be a Pupun! Every one was capable of creating a Pupun! Only I was not! This was the burden of Archana's sorrow and complaint.

After Pupun's arrival, our roles were reversed. The one who had prayed for Pupun kneeling down at the altar of 33 crore temples, bathing in a tank of red hot chillies, she had lost all desires! Her sleep never got disturbed at night and she nearly forgot the date of Polio injection. Shaking the box of baby food at night, she would remark: "Goodness, the baby food is over!" When Pupun had loose motion she would say: "None of them is necessary! Only a glass of sherbal with a pinch of salt and sugar will do the trick!"

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who had temples, Her sleep of Polio remark: motion f sherbal A handful of Bengali tourists loitering on the beach, turned and looked at us. Taking the injured self of Pupun on her lap, Archana admonished me: "You should never insult a child before others, it will only aggravate his complex." And then she said to Pupun "Come Baba, come my dear! The crab is not going to harm you!"

Shaking off his mother's hand, Pupun ran on and looked back. Eyes laden with anguish, he said "Allright, I shall tell my friends that my father is a demon who flings me into the sea!" Saying this, he fled

on the beach.

Archana called him back: "Pupun darling, come and leave your shoes behind!" But Pupun was in no mood to comply.

4 4 4

Holding the hand of Pupun, I had learnt how to walk. When Pupun had fallen down as a toddler, it was I who had cried the most despite his utter helplessness. I had suffered his constipation! And it was his hunger that forever fuelled the fire in my stomach! Pupun's cry had always upset our world.

Once when Pupun was one-and-a-half years old, he had cried out in the middle of the night. What could possibly be meant by the adventure of an infant? It was neither a war cry, a charter of demands or a slogan! "What is it Pupun? Would you like some water? Pupun pushed away the glass of water with his hand. Want a comb? Or a ball? Here, take this box or read the newspaper! A,B,C,D! One, two, three, four! Want to remove powder from the box? From the lower shelf of the dressing table? Want to pull out the broken clock from the drawer? Hair pin or imitation jewellery? All right! Now take this doll or that bear, tiger, cat or zebra. Or else, take the elephant that resembles a bear! Or the dog that resembles a jackal!"

Disinclined, Pupun pushed away everything. Suddenly, my happy and successful household had crumbled miserably into poverty. I had everything and yet nothing! For Pupun, that was my ultimate failure and disgrace!

公 公 公

The beach at Chandipur has no chaiwallah. None to sell "moori" or shells! And there is no camera-man either! A group of Bengalis are busy singing Rabindra Sangeet. In the sky, the bright orb of the moon! The sea has receded to a distance. Only its muffled roar is heard now. The

Jagdish Mohanty / 69

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Dash it! The light of the Panthanivas is ruining the moon light! Is it possible to have a cup of tea? What a pity! May be, we could go down to Balaramagadi. By the way, the house of John Beams is still preserved there! We could even seen how the Budhabalanga river joins the sea. Godness gracious! Such a long distance from a cup of tea! Pupun dear, do not be mad at us! Here, have some "mixture"! See, the road is dangerously dark, interspersed with pits! It's a new place after all!

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Pupun's first day in school was a real experience! You should have seen Archana cry after seeing Pupun into the bus! The house appeared utterly empty. With her head on my shoulder Archana sobbed as though she had placed Pupun on the funeral pyre! A few days earlier, I was totally lost in Pupun's dream world of new uniform, tiffin box and water bottle. For the first time, Pupun could sense what it meant to have his own possessions: school box, books, note books, pencil, eraser, tiffin box and water bottle. My sofa, colour T.V. air cooler, scooter, mixie and cooking gas—all appeared distinctly trivial before Pupun's gleaming new estate! Equally worthless was Archana's jewellery! We returned to the nursery rhymes. Like Jack and Jill, we climbed up the hill to fetch water and tumbled down one after the other!

As for Pupun, he used to return like a battle tested veteran with dog eared, torn books, shoes grimed with cow-dung, matched with dirty shirt and pant. At times, the casualty included lost buttons and money, forcing poor Archana and me to join the battle. We could always sense his helplessness, like Abhimanyu, of facing single handed, seven warriors!

"Why didn't you beat the daylight out of the chap that hit you? You should have pulled out his hair! Should have jabbed his eye with pencil or else bitten him! What were your teachers doing! Must have been busy as usual, in their gossip sessions! Or else surely knitting their sweaters! Couldn't you tell them?

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Leaving the beach behind, we went looking for tea inside the village. When we returned, there was sea at a distance. Everywhere, there was a pallid moon. The beach floor shone with a silvery light! We sat on a broken wall, a packet of "mixture" in Archana's hands "Here, Pupun,

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village. ere was e sat on Pupun,

help yourself!" I said. Pupun, of course had no interest. No crabs were visible in the darkness. The light from the Panthanivas lent a sepulchral glow. Suddenly, a jeep drove down the beach.

Shall we go to the waves? asked Archana.

"Yes, let us!" Pupun aloud, his voice making the girl singing Rabindra Sangeet turn back.

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Pupun's Convent School vocabulary had always been a matter of enigma for me and Archana. There were many words that we simply could not grasp. And some we could not imagine using in our conversation! These words were outside his nursery rhymes and books. Perfectly abusive and unprintable expressions! Pupun, the war veteran's account never failed to amaze and worry us. His vengeful self, always spawned nails and teeth, his unseen eyes, cruel laughter and his invisible face sported pride. Once again we returned to our study of moral science. Once again we recited parrot like: "Always speak the truth Pupun! Get up early in the morning! See what a wonderful day God has created! Pupun, come and eat what Ma has served you! Read what Baba has given you! Go and play Pupun! Never quarrel with anyone! Return good for evil! Return kiss for abuse! And is slapped on one cheek, show the other!"

There is now water beneath one's feet and yet they do not get wet. Only, one senses the feel of wet, sandy and muddy earth. Everywhere on the beach of Chandipur is spread out a layer of silvery moon light. Archana's emotional utterance: "Never have I seen such a sea in my life," and my state of meditative absent mindedness articulated earlier: "I was not impressed by the first sight of Chandipur!"-from all these Pupun walks away in a spirit of detachment.

Throwing a glance at him. Archana said: "You know, Pupun's virtue is that he has scrupulously followed our model of upbringing. But tell me, how exactly did we wish him to grow up! Do we really know what it means to be a good man?

Pupun's mind no longer had the fear of crab.

Walking ahead, he asked: "Mummy! is there a golden fish in the

☆ ☆

Pupun's life is sandwiched between Archana's college, her computer class, my office and our empty house. When Pupun wakes up, Archana is gone for her class. And when Pupun returns from school, there is Archana in her college and I in my office. Pupun waits for the maid servant. It was a persistent worry! Suppose the maid was absent, suppose there was a big lock on the door upon his return?....

"Why do you worry darling? Are not we there to think of you?" If the maid was absent, then we would be there! Mummy or I would

certainly take leave and stay back!"

"I feel scared Baba! I am still scared!" "Why do you fear my dear! Am I not there?

"Get up at Five, in the morning! Begin your mad rush with Pupun in mind! Ring up from the office! find out: Has Pupun returned? Has Archana returned? Ring up the garage of the school bus! Is the school bus okay? Is the driver on duty or is he on leave? Ring up Archana's college! Find out if she has her staff council Meeting! In the evening, on the way back, collect Pupun from the play ground and make him do his home work!"

With all this, one is naturally unhinged. At times, Pupun seeks out his own destiny, devoid of parental contact and announces: "Give me the key Ma when you leave for your computer class! I shall keep sitting in the drawing room and ring up Baba in case I feel scared!" Only at such times does Archana notice that Pupun is no more keen to play or mix with any one. He watches other children at play from a distance. Helpless, he sits absent-minded on the study table, forgets his addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. And when he does attend to his studies, he gets arrogant and defiant.

"Mummy, how does a golden fish look?" Pupun asks as he walks ahead on the beach.

Far away, there is the roar of the waves. And behind, there is the dim light of the Panthanivas. Further off are visible, the flickering lights of the Missile Centre's colony. Around us, there is slice of sliver. In the sky, there is the moon and clouds all around. Beneath our feet, there is muddy earth. Watch out, there could be quick sand some

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where! Every step appears uncertain. Baba Pupun, watch carefully come and hold our hands!"

The sea is far away. Only its roar is now audible. Those that sang Rabindra Sangeet on the beach of Chandipur, the Bengali tourists—they are not visible any longer. At a distance, the lights of the Panthanivas are twinkling. What is it right ahead? Is it a rock? Where is so much of fog coming from? Could it be fog or some smoke at sea? Or are we in the middle of the sea?"

"Mummy, what does the golden fish eat?"

Our hearts beat fast. There is no one in sight. What we called the beach is no longer visible. Have we reached the middle of the sea? Is some giant monster going to emerge from the deep? Will we get dragged into the depths by some undercurrent? Can not we have the glimpse of the waves? Or will our feet slip in?

"Mummy, what is the colour of the golden fish?"

From somewhere, there comes the sound of a roar! The black rock appears to be rearing its head. Everywhere there is the silver sea! It is there and yet not there! Forever elusive! We seem to be on our Great Journey, on the waters of the still and immobile ocean. Archana gripped my hand in fear. "Let us not go any further," she said, "I am getting scared!" "Baba Pupun, please come back!"

"Do not go any further Pupun! There could be a quicksand somewhere. There is no one around! So quiet and yet so fearful, this Nature! Come back dear! Let us get back to the beach of Chandipur! Back to the middle of the village, to the town of Balasore! Return to our town, to our house, our bed and to our secure quilt!

Pupun keeps running ahead. And we are frozen by fear! Not a soul in sight! Only the sea, the moon, the sky and the clouds! Death could be lurking somewhere! Pupun darling! Our creation! Come back dear! And hold our hand! Let us get back to the beach!

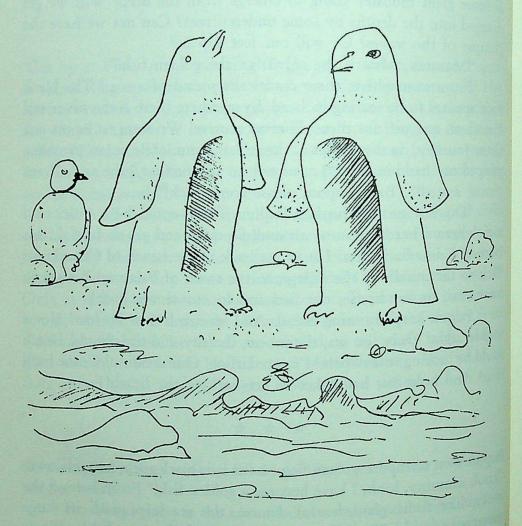
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Pupun went scampering. Standing on the jade black rock, he exclaimed: "Look mummy, look, I have become a golden fish!" From behind the rocks, like some giant fearful demon, the sea leapt with its huge monstrous waves. We shook in fear by its turbulence and thunderous roar.

"Is the tide coming once again?" Come on Pupun! We must save our dreams and our life!" A giant breaker came and dashed against the rock. Water climbed from our feet up to the knee and receded. With my hand as a grip for support, Archana cried out: "Pupun!"

With the noise of the sea, the cry no longer reached me.

Translated from Oriya by Sachidananda Mohanty



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The Foundling

Sanjoy Kumar Satpathy

Time's cruel hand had transformed me from a young cricketer to a middle-aged team manager. I was taking a bunch of cricketers much younger than I was to north India for a summer cricket tournament. Though Delhi was not one of the venues, the boys had insisted that tickets be booked from Rourkela to the national capital.

The Puri-Hazrat Nizamuddin Utkal Express was late by threequarters of an hour at Rourkela. The players were getting restless. Virendra, a Punjabi boy said, "Uncle, you must travel with us in our compartment."

At this, I became thoughtful. Perhaps the boys sensed that I was upset. They at once reprimanded Virendra: "We shall call him either 'sir' or 'manager'."

I tried to correct the misunderstanding: "No, it is not Virendra's 'uncle' that upset me. Rather the present situation reminded me of my own past as a cricketer, when I was like you.

"Like you all, I too was somewhat naughty. It was around this time of the year that I was travelling by Utkal Express for the Frank Worrell Trophy in Lucknow. The difference is that I was then travelling as a player, with Purusottam (or Purusu as his friends called him) as our manager: a most interesting person he was. The honorific, 'Uncle' usually upset him. When Virendra called me 'uncle', I was reminded of him. Alas! He is now no more."

"See, it was not my fault!" Virendra said, good-humouredly. I continued pretending not to hear him. "Nevertheless, the incident, which had then taken place, lives in my memory as fresh as ever. It haunts me whenever I travel in a train."

"Sir, please tell us about it," the boys clamoured.

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"No, not now and in this hullabaloo. Let the train pull in. I will tell you the story once we are on board."

The train arrived, and the team boarded it. No sooner had the boys settled down, than they repeated their demand: "Sir, please tell us the story." The train picked up speed, and I, the thread of my narrative.

"That day too the Utkal Express was late by an hour. It was not possible for so many of us to get reservation in one compartment. Some were in S-5, the rest were in S-6. Manager Purusu was quite a sport, with a wonderful sense of humour. Unfortunately, his wife died after a heart surgery, and he had married a widow despite opposition from his grown up kids. Presently, he disbursed two days' allowance and declared, 'Now we shall talk about money only when we reach Delhi.' He issued a stern warning to everyone, especially to Vikram and Gautam, that no one should address him as 'uncle', especially in the presence of women passengers. That form of address always upset him. He said, 'Either call me by my name, Purusottam or just Manager'.

"Some players started playing cards on a makeshift table by placing two trunks together; some others started reading novels, the rest sat around the players as interested spectators. The lot was so engrossed in the game of cards and chitchatting that before they could realize it, it was lunchtime. The train halted at the Bilaspur station. The manager had alerted everyone about the notoriety of the station, and asked us to be watchful. Orders for lunch had been placed earlier: so many veg. and so many non-veg. thalis. God alone knows why I feel so hungry during these journeys. Railway food, bland and tasteless though it is, I still find it quite appetizing.

"After lunch when I went to the washbasin, I saw a couple with their 3-4 year-old kid. What a cute boy, I told myself! Fair with ruddy cheeks, and jet black, shining hair! His mother ought to have put a black mark on his forehead lest some evil eye cast a spell on him. His dad was not so fair, but was well-built. It was impossible to know his mom's skin color, as a black burkha had covered her from tip to toe, including her face. The boy was very restless, would not stay put anywhere. He mixed freely with total strangers on the train in spite of his mom's repeated scolding."

"The soporific effect of lunch ensured that some players dozed off before long. The child was with his mother. After lying down for a while I represent the control of sorts.

a while, I returned to the scene of the game of cards.

"One of the members of our team, a Muslim boy, was so bored with the elderly fellow-passengers in his compartment that he soon

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so bored he soon joined us in our coach. He began chatting with the couple in Urdu. When the couple learnt that we were a bunch of cricketers, the lady lost the little inhibition she had. It soon transpired that the two were cricket buffs; hence they had named their son Imran after the great Pakistani cricketer.

"The woman removed the burkha revealing the most exquisite face I have ever seen. Almost everyone in our team was a bachelor. One can only imagine what thoughts must have passed their minds when they saw the beautiful woman's face. I wondered whether I have ever seen such a gorgeous woman. Maybe on the silver screen or in some glossy film magazines; never in flesh and blood. If only I could find a girl like her, I would make her my own, no matter of what religion or caste she may be.

"By and by, we learnt that the little family was from Bilaspur. The man was in the Indian Army, and they were going on a holiday. Men are by nature flirtatious. If all men flirt to a greater or lesser extent, how can we players be exceptions? We all had become oblivious of our existence in the presence of that full-blown lotus of early spring. Soon everyone was vying with each other to befriend the child. The child of a beautiful mother will always be much sought after by men, there is no denying the fact. Some men even try to entice the child from the mother's arm directly."

My players laughed aloud and said, "Sir, hats off to your power of observation! Tell us whether you yourself tried to cuddle the boy." "It is a sin to covet another man's wealth or woman'. When I repeated the adage, I was ashamed of myself as I too had joined the other teammates to snuggle the boy."

"Imran found the overdose of affection somewhat stifling, and would run off to his mother every now and then. After sunset, his father spread a bed sheet on the floor and started his *namaaz*. We had nothing better to do in the dim light than to gaze through the window towards the crimson horizon rather aimlessly. We were all somewhat distracted.

"Alam, the Muslim player in our team, who had by now be-friended the couple, would often take Imran to his compartment." Here I stopped and said, "Okay, that's enough for now. We are about to reach Anuppur. Isn't this station famous for its samosa and tea?" The scheduled stoppage time at Anuppur is brief. But the railway officials, especially the guards, detain the train for a while longer. The shopkeepers and the passengers both benefit from this.

When the train started, I resumed my narrative, "That day, with

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Imran disappearing with Alam ever so often, we all lost track of him All young players, we were very hungry. It was about 8.30 in the evening. The dinner trays were being carted, and the compartment was full of the characteristic flavour of railway food.

"It was time too for Imran to eat. His mother began calling out for him. Wasn't he somewhere near me a little while before? He was playing with his toy and I was busy reading a novel, James Hadley Chase's The World in My Pocket. I remember vividly even now that when he first came to me and I offered him chocolates, he had said 'No, Mom will scold me. I shall ask her first and then eat it.' Now, in the confusion over Imran I was unable to concentrate on the book. The Manager who was busy with cards said, 'He may be there with Alam.' Even that tip did not help. The whole team conducted a thorough search in the two adjacent compartments. People even looked below their seats. The mother was quite perturbed. The father blamed her and started scolding her in Urdu. Army officers seldom lose their cool; but, when they do, they are uncontrollable."

"We then decided to pull the emergency chain, so that the other compartments could also be searched. The train was in a tremendous speed in its attempt to make up for lost time, and a tug or two wouldn't help. The chain was pulled at several points and by several people. Now, there was no way Utkal Express would not stop. The driver and guard came steaming in; they were furious, and asked who had pulled the chain. The whole team said, 'Us' in a chorus. 'This lady here can't find her child.'

"Even gods have yielded to the beauty of women. These were mere mortals. The driver calmed down and said, 'The next station is Kutni. You can conduct a thorough search there. Also, the station master there will help.'

"But that half an hour was like eternity. The boy had befriended

all of us. He had become a member of the team!

"When Imran was not traced even in Kutni, the couple got of the train. Though we could not see the expression on the face of the mother with her burkha, we could sense her anguish. We had nothing to give her but our heartfelt sympathy. We prayed for the safe return of the child to the mother.

"The Utkal Express sped on towards its destination. In the gloom surrounding the disappearance of Imran, none of us was in any mood to eat supper that night. All of us felt that somehow, the team was responsible for what had happened. Before we played the first match of the tournament, the manager told us that we needed to win the

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e gloom y mood eam was st match win the trophy for little Imran. All of us were so motivated that our performance level was much higher than expectation, and we went on to win the tournament. On our way back, we again took the Utkal Express, with the same question in everyone's mind: 'Did Imran's mother get back Imran? If she did, was he alive or dead?'

Presently, my players could bear the suspense no more. They said, "Sir, what happened after that? Did you try to find out later on?" I told them, "It is quite late now. Time for the intermission. I shall

tell you the rest of the story tomorrow morning."

The following morning, I was woken up by the hubbub in the compartment and the shouting of the chai wallah. I had just washed my face and was waiting for breakfast to be served, when a fellow passenger told me, "Kindly finish the rest of the story. I shall get off soon." Obviously, she had listened to me intently the previous night. The players had finished their breakfast in the meantime, and sat around me to listen to the story. I resumed my narration without any further ado, as I sipped my morning cup of tea.

"Eight years later, I was again travelling to Delhi by Utkal Express, this time with my wife and my four year old son, to attend my nephew's wedding. Suddenly I saw the same couple at Bilaspur. I could not muster enough courage to ask the gentleman anything. The mother had an infant in her arms. Had Imran then disappeared forever? I see the same question on your face as had occurred to me then. The gentleman asked me if he could borrow my Illustrated Weekly of India and started reading it.

"After a while, I broke the silence and asked him, 'Your son, Imran..?

'You know my son's name?'...the gentleman said with a start. "I said, 'You may not recall, but I was your fellow passenger on the fateful day Imran was lost, as a member of the Rourkela cricket

'Now I know why you look so familiar,' the gentleman took a long breath and said. 'I shall tell you what happened after we got off the train that day, but I have to prepare myself for that. Maybe, I shall have to get away from my wife for a while.'

"When he was satisfied with the situation, he resumed his tale: 'The stationmaster at Kutni was very cooperative. He telephoned all the railway stations on the route and informed them about Imran, giving them his detailed description. He consoled us by saying that there never had occurred a case of abduction in the area, and the child would certainly be found alive, unless he had fallen off the running

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train. After four hours or so, he arranged for us to be sent back on the van of a goods train to Setola, the station where we had first noticed Imran's absence.'

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"After that, the gentleman fell quiet for sometime, and said, I knew that only a miracle could have saved Imran and he would come back to us alive. When we reached Setola, we were told that no one had seen anyone with a child. In fact, no one had got off the train that night. The following morning too there was no news about Imran. I told begum jan 'There is no hope. We shall go back to Bilaspur by the next available train.' She refused to budge an inch without Imran.

'It was evening, and I was gazing at the setting sun. During the day, my wife continued to ask every single coolie, vendor, railway official, cleaner, everyone she saw, piteously whether they had seen our Imran. It was eleven o' clock in the night. Sleepless for two nights, the anxiety over Imran had driven sleep from us. We could feel the fatigue, though. Just then, I could make out from the conversation among a small crowd that had gathered around the stationmaster that a lineman had found a child on the railway track the previous night. However, he had not reported for duty that day. A ray of hope was kindled in our hearts. On inquiry, I found out that the name of the lineman was Babu Rao, a drunkard. He lived close to the station.

'Without delay, we rushed to his house. His wife came out and started hurling abuses at us: about how careless we were, and how we were enjoying ourselves without minding the child, and so on. On the other hand, her husband had to put up with sleepless nights and beatings by the police. Was it his duty to attend to the child in the hospital?

'When she saw my wife in tears, she calmed down a bit. On being asked how the child looked like etc, she narrated the whole incident Babu Rao was on duty the previous night. When he was returning from the distant railway signal with a lantern in his hand, he noticed a child lying unconscious on the tracks near where the coal engine got it supply of water. He thought it was God's gift to them, and took the child home. The childless couple had thought of adopting him. Whet the child did not get back his sense, Babu Rao took him to the hospital On the way, however, the police caught him and, not satisfied with his answer about where he had found the child, roughed him up. The forced to speak the truth, he and Imran were escorted by the police to the hospital in a police jeep. This was all that she knew. Babu Ra returned home the following morning, and after taking a bath, he were

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back with some money. He had not returned, it was already so late in the night."

"The gentleman continued: 'We thanked Allah, and with rekindled hope we took a cycle rickshaw and headed for the hospital. There we were told that a nameless boy had been admitted care of Babu Rao. On reaching the ward, we were amazed at what we saw. There lay Imran on a hospital bed without a bed sheet, motionless. He was on drips. Babu Rao was holding the hand into which the needle had been inserted. It was unbelievable, the sight. Imran's forehead was smeared with vermilion and sandalwood paste.

'When we went near the bed, the nurse said that they had run out of all the medicines. We needed to hurry. Poor Babu Rao had paid for the saline drips and medicines. Now he was not left with any money to pay for the medicines.

'When he came to know that we were the child's parents, he looked in dismay and disbelief. He merely mumbled: Now you take care of your son. So saying he hurriedly left Imran, kissing him gently. He could not hold back his tears nor could he hide them from us though he tried to look the other way. For a moment I thought that it would have been better if we had not heard of Imran. The man looked shattered. He must have started dreaming of a new life!

'Imran gradually recovered in the same hospital. He was discharged ten days later. Amid all celebrations and a tremendous sense of relief, I couldn't help pondering how a devout Hindu had cared for Imran and saved his life unselfishly. Little did he care for the child's religion, when he carried him to the hospital. He could have done anything to avoid the trouble and the expenses.

On the day we were to leave the place, we thought of looking Babu Rao up. We found his house locked. We were told that he was on his way to Tirupati. His wife had conceived after ten years of marriage!

'The incident haunts us like a nightmare even now. We try to forget it, as much for our own sake as the pain we inflicted on Babu Rao and his wife. It is some consolation that they were blessed by both the Muslim and the Hindu gods. True we got our Imran back. But we were forever indebted to Babu Rao.

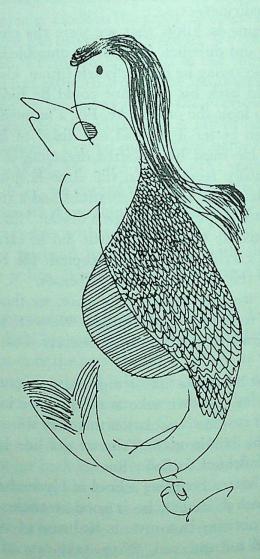
'Now Imran is in a boarding school in Hyderabad. A very well-groomed boy. Good at studies, he is good at cricket too.'

"Meanwhile noticing that my son had strayed away, the gentleman mildly chided me and said, 'Now, take care of your son, lest another incident occur.' "I asked him, 'How did Imran fall off?'

'Who can say, how he fell off,' he replied almost in a whisper, and thoughtfully, 'and how he survived? I only know that he returned, and know who to thank.'

"What a wonderful story" all my boys said in a chorus, almost out of relief. My throat had parched from non-stop talking. Virendra opened the flask and said, "Have some tea, Sir!"

Translated from Oriya by Sumanyu Satpathy



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The Touch

Sushmita Rath

There was total quiet everywhere. Shehnai was playing lightly inside the room. She had switched the lights off. She had been playing this game since a long time standing on the balcony. She loved the rains. She had a great deal of fascination during her childhood to get drenched in the rains. She ran to the rooftop as soon as the rains started after the long summer. She never bothered about her mother getting angry with her. Mother used to dry her head with a towel when she returned from the rooftop, totally wet. Mother used to say, "Come on, Suni. You are now a grown-up girl. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? How can you run to the rooftop just to get wet? What would the neighbours think? Should you behave like a stupid girl throughout your life?" The touch of love transmitted through her mother's hand seemed to overwhelm her even after all these years.

That stupid girl Suni had metamorphosed now into Sunanda. She was living with her husband, son and daughter in an eighth floor apartment in Mumbai. Her husband was a high-ranking officer. The children had grown up.

For some reason Sunanda's eyes turned damp. She tried to reason with herself—she was turning sentimental only because of her environment. Tears welled up in her eyes these days even when she felt happy. Sometimes, the pain one felt inside her also brought happiness...yes, her chest seemed heavy out of extreme happiness.

She recalled that she had felt this kind of pain in her chest when she had just got married to Vivek and was waiting for his return from the office, decked up with flowers on her head. She wondered if she could press down her heart that kept on thumping

within her chest and bring it to a standstill! She suffered in the process, But she had kept on waiting to feel that pain. Prapti was born a few months later. She went through a great deal of sufferings. But what happiness it had brought in its wake! She was wiping the tears away from her eyes time and again. As her mother caressed her head sitting near her. She had asked, "Are you scared?" She had been possessed by a wonderful feeling even though she had been scared witless. She wanted to hold on to that feeling very intimately deep inside her. She had experienced excruciating pain when Prasad was born. It was the time when Prasad was taking shape bit by bit inside her. She could neither eat nor sleep for days on end. The doctors had worried a great deal about her. But she had derived a great deal of pleasure from that experience. She had lost herself in wild fancies holding on to the head of the young Prapti. The memories of those days were fading. All of them had progressed quite a distance holding on to the hands of Time-Vivek, Prapti, Prasad and she herself.

Vivek worked in the top management now. Age was catching up on him. Sunanda too showed her age. Prapti got a job in the campus recruitment and was undergoing training. Prasad was studying in the college. They were too busy with themselves in this fast changing world. They would fall on the wayside if they could not keep pace with the change. Who wanted to see his name in the list of failures?

Vivek was always a capable man. He could take care of himself in every conceivable way. Sunanda never had to stretch herself on account of him. On the other hand, she had learnt quite a bit of housekeeping from him after marriage. She knew that she was really stupid until the time of her marriage. She might have perhaps learn a few-things if she would have stayed for a while with her mother in-law. But she never had had that opportunity. She had to accompany Vivek to his place of work after marriage. They had put in a lo of hard work to set up home. Vivek had explained everything to her in detail. She learnt interior decoration from the wives of his friends. She turned into an expert cook in a few days too. Vivel was always beside her those days.

Vivek had not allowed her to go to her mother even when Prapti was born. He found no justification to go there foregoing all the comforts and state-of-the-art medical facilities of a big city. Instead, he had brought her mother near them for a few days. He took care of the baby for a substantial part of the day even after the departure of her mother. Sunanda used to be amazed. How could be a substantial part of the day even after the departure of her mother.

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And now! How the same Vivek had changed! Of course, he had to assume greater responsibilities at the office with each passing day. Sunanda was busy at home in looking after the children. Times were changing. Everything else too kept on changing. There was a great deal of difference in waiting for Vivek's return home those days and his return home today. The wait was colourful in the past. Today, it had turned colourless and to some extent, irritating.

The shehnai cassette had run its course. The rains too had stopped outside. It was already eight in the evening. It would still be quite a while before Vivek returned home. Prasad had perhaps been delayed because of the rains. She entered into Prasad's room dragging her tired feet after her. Everything was lying in a disorderly state. His clothes and books were lying carelessly on the bed. The window was left open. The window screen and the table were wet with rainwater. The towel was lying on the floor. The jogging shoes had been carelessly thrown near the door. Sunanda felt irritated. How could he be so disorderly being the son of Vivek? Sunanda was talking to herself angrily while trying to bring some order in the room. It did not matter anyway. Her anger meant nothing to Prasad. He would laugh it away. Sometime, he would pull her near the television and show her some American movie and say, "Mama, your time is over. Just watch how these people live. They find only one day in a week to put things in order. So, they get used to living like that. What is the problem with that? I cannot find half of my things when you try to put my room in order. I can't even find my books and papers!" Sunanda closed the window. She did not touch anything that was lying on the bed. She only picked up the towel and the coffee mug and moved out of the room. Prasad might be disorderly in his personal life. But he was quite focussed when it came to his studies or career.

Prapti had not telephoned in the last five to six days. No one was willing to write letters these days. They would rather talk on the telephone for fifteen minutes—but no one had the patience when it came to writing letters. There was no point in sulking either. The girl was learning the ropes. Sunanda could not disturb her all the time. She would call on her own in her own sweet time.

She kept moving from one room to another. Finally, she came and stood again on the balcony. She had nothing else to do except to keep waiting. This had turned into her major work these days.

She was no longer needed by anyone. Sunanda started wondering whether she should start thinking about doing something for herself. Vivek always kept exhorting her to keep herself engaged in different chores. But she did not feel like doing any such work. She longed to remain submerged in her own little world. And yet, she had a nagging premonition that that little world of hers was slipping away from her hands. Sunanda knew that she was allowing her imagination to run away with her. Her world had remained intact even today. In spite of that knowledge, tears welled up in her eyes every now and then. She thought about her mother quite often these days. She had not visited her mother since a long time busy as she was in her own little world. She was never sure that these people could take care of themselves in Mumbai in her absence. Vivek would be inconvenienced. Prasad would miss her and worry. Who was going to cook for them in case the bai did not come?

The calling bell rang. Sunanda knew that Vivek had arrived. Prasad too returned a bit later. The silent flat turned overfull with the conversation of father and son. She had been listening to their talk as she was heating up the soup. She thought that the house had been in the grips of a cold wave in the absence of these fragmented words. Perhaps that was why she had felt a chill inside her chest until then. There seemed to be a tremor inside her. Heat was now generated because of friction of words which was gradually bringing back life within her. Prasad said that he had already had dinner at his friend's place. He wished everyone good night loudly and went inside his room to sleep. Vivek washed himself and sat down for dinner. Sunanda also picked up her own plate and sat near him. They made small talk while having dinner. Vivek talked about the office. Sunanda talked about home.

As she came to sleep after finishing the remaining chores, Sunanda stared at Vivek. He seemed to be tired after a hard day's work. Yet he had the newspaper open in his hand. He did not have the time to read the newspaper in the morning. Hence, he finished the before going to the bed. As she pulled a thin bed sheet towards her. She extended her hand and enclosed the fingers of Vivek ther own fingers. Vivek smiled a bit in an absentminded manner. His eyes went back to the newspaper again. This time she pulled the newspaper away. She had sat throughout the day with her lipt sealed. She had a right to a little bit of conversation; to hear what was happening outside the confines of the house. She talked of assorted things. She told him that Prapti had not telephoned. As if it was

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all Vivek's fault. She said. "Your darling daughter seems to have forgotten you, you know!"

Vivek smiled. As he turned his back towards her while going to sleep, he said. "Remind me to carry the income tax file before I leave for office tomorrow in the morning. Oh yes! You are coughing throughout the night. Why don't you take your medicine regularly?" His eyes closed as he said that. Sunanda would have run her fingers over his head like a mother had it been some other day. But her eyes burned in anger today. Was she not a human being? No one wanted to spare even five minutes for her during the entire day!

She sat in a grim mood when she got up in the morning. She did not feel like doing any work. Why should she continue to stay there if no one needed her? Should she go to her mother? Vivek seemed to be overtaken by anxiety seeing her grim countenance. He made two cups of coffee and extended a cup towards her. He said. "Aren't you feeling well? Shall I call Dr. Mehra?" Sunanda remained quiet. She extended the income tax file silently as Vivek started out for the office after finishing his work.

She had to go to the market to get a cough mixture as also some other medicines. It was also time to pay the telephone bill. But she did not feel like doing anything even then. She asked the maid to take care of the various chores and lay down on the bed for a while. She came to the decision that she had to go to her mother one of these days. Prasad's examination was just ahead. But would Prasad miss her if she went to her mother's place?

She received the reply to her letter from her mother quite soon. She was happy that mother had replied so quickly. She must have been very happy to know that Sunanda had expressed her desire to visit her. She opened the letter and read:

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My blessings to all of you. Have you continued to remain the same stupid Suni even now? I had thought that you had turned into quite a lady of the house. Your mother-in-law, father-in-law and Vivek have all been talking about that. But I discovered that you are still that sulking cry-baby of yesteryears when I went through your letter. It would seem that every small matter disturbs you a great deal even now. You still seem to burst into tears at the drop of a feather. The sobbing face of your childhood floated by me when I read your letter. What makes you so sad, my dear? This phase comes in the life of every woman. If you look at it, everyone is lonely all the

Sushmita Rath / 87

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time—it is just that we connect ourselves with other people. And girls are born with this trait. The more you can keep yourself connected, the better you are as a daughter or daughter-in-law or mother or mother-in-law. Give this a thought. All of you grew up. Your brother got married. He worked and stayed at Bangalore. You got married and you are at Mumbai. Your younger brother too got married after you. My home became overfull. But I started getting lonelier by the day. I was lonely amidst all. No one had neglected me. But everyone stayed away in his own work. You lived with your family. Your brothers lived with their families. Your brothers wanted that I should live with them when your father passed away. But how could I go elsewhere ignoring this old house in Bhubaneswar, the Lingaraj temple, my relations, my neighbours, your Sujata Aunty, Maguni Maa the maid, Dashu Nana the cook. Bauli the cow, Kalu the dog and Minnie the cat? We always get imprisoned inside the circles that we build for ourselves. But it would be foolhardy on our part to expect our children to stay inside those circles. You left me some years ago to set up your own little world. Now your children have grown up. They will find their own places where they will settle down. There is nothing to be sad about it. The world keeps on expanding everyday. Is it possible for man to extend his hand all the way? Man is getting smaller day by day. But it is not possible to touch the boundary unless someone keeps pace with it. Remain assured that the elephant might live in the forest; yet, it belongs to the king. Your husband and children belong to you wherever in the world they might be. They will come running to you first with their hands extended if ever they run into any kind of trouble.

You have written that you want to come here. Come soon. I have been waiting with bated breath to have a glimpse of you. You might not be aware of it! But I know that the girl within you has already spread her roots far and wide in this world. She cannot go anywhere else. You might disagree now; but you cannot stay elsewhere peacefully for any length of time. Your insides will be in a churn. Not only for Vivek or Prasad. But also for the chair standing on your balcony. For the part of the sky visible from your flat. For the earth below. For the dog in the house of the neighbour. For the mad son of Lata, your neighbour, who keeps swaying from one side to the other while singing incessantly. Just think about for a while. Suni. And then take me to task if I am telling you a lie.

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Me, my daughter, i.e. you and your daughter—each of us is a river. The river will keep on flowing generation after generation—just make sure that the riverhead does not get buried. That water carries away all the pains and sufferings of this world. That river will overflow the banks if we let go and start crying. Everything will get washed away in that. Vivek will be fighting for his survival. Prapti and Prasad will be unable to breathe.

Let the Lord provide you with the strength, my dear. My blessings are always with you. Ask Vivek to get you here sometime.

I long to see you all. God bless!

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The corner of her saree had got wet with her tears. She was breaking into a sob. And yet, she was amazed to discover that her semi-literate mother, who had rarely stepped out of that old house in Bhubaneswar, could think of all these things and write about them. Had she been able to know her anguish just because she was her mother? She had never seen this trait of her mother-it was perhaps because she had never felt the need to discover that. Today, mother had understood that her daughter was weakening. She had extended her own chest to make it stronger before the collapse of the bridge. That bridge was not going to collapse any more. She was not going to lose patience in a hurry ever again. Prasad was calling from the other side. "Mama! Mama! I am hungry. Aren't you going to serve dinner? You seem to be in a dark mood today. Shall I get some ice cream for you from the shop downstairs?" Sunanda quickly entered inside the bathroom. As she washed her face, she thought it was lucky that Prasad had not been able to see her face. Otherwise, he would have taken her to task playfully.

Translated from Oriya by Ashok K. Mohanty

Sushmita Rath / 89

Worm on the Bough

Yashodhara Mishra

Che lay there on the hospital bed, fenced around by curtained stands. She was not the same Anjali she used to be.

A khaki-clad police officer sat on a chair by her bed, taking down notes, pausing from time to time to check certain details. The dying statement of the victim was important. The family members had been asked to leave the room so that there would be no pressure of any kind while she spoke.

"How did the fire break out? Please try to recall, Madam.

What time? What caused it?"

She did not reply to all the questions. The words coming from

the burnt black lips were not clear.

Noises seeped in; people outside were talking a little more loudly now. Someone was comforting others. Voices were being raised. "What's the matter, Anjali?" he had enquired.

The police officer repeated his questions. May be Anjali cannot make out what he says, or she cannot hear him, or she is not conscious The officer knows his duty well: he has to somehow squeeze out the details before she died.

"Were you happy with your life? Any complaint against anyone?

What about dowry from your parents?"

Another policeman patrolled behind the curtains, baton in hand The elderly woman in the adjacent bed waits with cocked ears; but nothing reaches her. What is the horrible corpse saying from he bed? Why is she dying?

The body on the bed is opening its mouth. Can it think? Anjali's meticulously arranged wardrobe glimmers. Sarees hang ing neatly, not a speck of dirt on them. With matching blouses all

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Sighs escape from the khaki uniform, his eyes go back to the wristwatch. What waste of time!

"How many children? A four-year-old? Okay. Did you love

your child?"

The corpse shuts its eyes. Her blistered lips are pressing on the clenched jaws. "Mummy, give me chocolates for tiffin tomorrow." Chocolates were a must in Munu's lunch-box.

"Has she passed out? Call the nurse!"

The police officer sprang from his chair. Hopeless! Nothing to get here. Better to get the statement from the man sitting on the bench outside, his head resting on his palms.

Anjali opened her eyes. Have they left? But she hasn't told

them anything yet. Should she call them back?

Her own ears could not make out what sounds her mouth uttered. How long has she been unconscious? Or was she just recovering from it?

The pictures were overlapping one above the other. Anjali's flashy drawing room. Ajit's friends admire it, sitting there sipping tea. Their wives watch around from the corners of their eyes, and look away in envy. After the guests leave, Anjali settles down on the sofa from where the gentlemen had admired her, and she looks on at her own creation with contentment.

Noises came from the veranda, they are talking somewhat loudly now. A voice of authority quietens others. Several voices talk again. What questions was Ajit being grilled with? How did his face look now?

Generally Ajit was so cool and composed.

Seeing Anjali upset when he got back from his office, once Ajit had asked so eagerly, "What's the matter, Anjali?" Snuggling beside him Anjali had replied, "Nothing feels good these days. Munu goes away to school, and I am all alone." Ajit took her into his arms, with his warm, almost compassionate smile. "I know what you mean Anju! But don't you understand darling, it is the same with all urban middle class housewives these days. This is the riddle of need and fulfillment, you see. If you are denied something, it's the end of the world. And once you get it, it becomes cheap, banal! The mind cannot hang on to the same point of gratification for ever, can it?"

It was so easy for Ajit to dissect any situation and explain the details, like solving a riddle! No tangled knots, no puzzle was beyond him. Like a bright school boy he took just a minute to work it

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it remained a couple of intricate hieroglyphs for Anjali.

Where was Ajit now? What would he be thinking about? Was he thinking of Anjali? Was he angry with her? What kind of anger? What kind of feelings would he have for Anjali now, anger, hatred, pity, fear, what?

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Ajit was sitting outside on a bench. The police officer had just left. Ajit, who never knowingly wished anyone ill, what was he brooding over now? Praying that Anju's life be saved? So that he himself would be saved, from the police, from the world. But the woman struggling and tossing here for life and breath, is she Anjali? Who would it be to leave her hospital bed and come home?

The numbness that was seeping to his bone marrows, what name to give it? Panic? And all the other waves that took turns to engulf him, were they grief, shame, bitterness? May be all that has been consumed now. Only the horridly burnt figure on the white bed. and the man in uniform beside her, these were the only truths at the moment.

The indifferent khaki-uniform would take down all that he heard or fancied. Ajit stared vacantly at the white wall: isn't there a way to start life afresh, hold one's head high once more? If only he could catch at a straw from the past, something that was whole and pure

just a few days ago, like a quiet flowing river!

Lying on her bed, Anjali tries to focus. Nothing can be heard. But she can guess how the questions would be asked and eventually the answer all of them would reach at. Anjali discovers that there is still something living and fresh inside her head. She wants to know what Ajit's reply would be. Would he tell them whatever he has seen, or just that he was innocent? Ajit, striding ever confident through life, always a master of situations, how does he look now? Though there seemed to be a wall between her body and her being, Anjal could still feel a surge of curiosity rising inside her.

The thought came to her that the image of hers that was there in Ajit's mind must also have turned to black charcoal by now. But what about the occasional surges of passion that he felt for her even

today? Would it come to his mind again?

Doesn't Ajit want to know what Anjali feels now? Or the unexpected blow he is facing right now has blocked his mind to everything else?

But how much could she tell them in just some simple statements How much could be revealed anyway through the questions the ask: How was your conjugal life? Any complaints?

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Would she throw at their faces the truth they want, like a pellet from a catapult, that in spite of a loving and caring husband like Ajit she had been drawn into a forbidden relationship with Bikash? And when Ajit learned about it, she could not think of any other option than to kill herself.

The familiar, age-old formula would suit everyone. No one would get confused. Even the criticism and derision might die down with time and pity take its place. But would that put an end to their questions? Her heart was pounding in her lifeless form, but the mind was clearing up amazingly. May be the next question would be: How did your husband behave after learning the truth? Did you try to apologise? Or you thought your sin was too great to be forgiven?

And then would she tell them what she had in mind? No, there was no guilt. She was simply torn apart between passion and apathy, between Bikash and Ajit. Everything around her had gone so dreary and flat. Then came those sparks that lighted up her dreary life, all so suddenly, and she could not go back. She set fire to her own world.

Questions haunt her yet. But how did Bikash come into your life? Didn't Ajit suit you? Did you have disappointment?

When she shut her eyes, the room and the white ceiling vanished. But inside her head all that was smoky and hazy was clearing up.

Who else but Anjali herself could judge now if the man of her dream ever came to her life or not?

Now she has to answer the question, that what were the hopes, the plans that made her go ahead with Bikash. Did she really see in him the perfect man that she had been looking for all her life, and had found nowhere else? Not even in the well off, loving Ajit, in none at all.

But why this absurd ruminating now? She, like all her friends had never hoped to get in their husbands the hero of their favourite novels or movies.

The ideal lover. He dwells in the mind, who can deny this fact? He may come in the form of a darling star in a favourite movie. Or in the lines of a tune that has touched your heart in childhood. Or again as the young Lord Krishna on the banks of river Yamuna. The scenes of some novel might bring him in, spreading all over her sky like the monsoon clouds.

But marriage is something else. It stays where it must, like the house alter for deities. You cleanse your soul, fast, grind sandal-paste

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and wait for it garland in hand. You open your eyes to receive a cast-off, stale flower in your palms. Why compare it to a living, blossoming bud on a tree?

Then how did you take the wrong road?

Teens. Her eyes would at times rise from the ground, and meet another pair. She would avert her gaze quickly. These men were not worthy of her. Her life couldn't be handed over to anybody. She would preserve it, for some radiant ecstasy. Meanwhile the burntfaces could look on from far as much as they wanted.

What happened to the wealth she had carefully invested in all these years? She did receive something in exchange, there is no denying that. But what kind of deal was this in which you give away your

own being?

As though Anjali was testing herself, if the wealth been all spent or if it was still there. She was seeing if she had any hold over her own body, which she had once tamed, even as the reins were lying

in another pair of hands now.

And as she tries her strength the reins slip out of her hands. Like before assessing the current you step into the stream. May be the first moment of indecision is enough to make you lose balance and slide into the unknown depths beyond space and time. It is only the first moment though. Next moment it is no more. Just for that much one gives up one's rights over hard ground.

Someone pesters again. It is the nurse standing by her bed. She was asking how Anjali felt. Sympathy had transformed her from a hospital staff-nurse into a human being. But how could she reach

Anjali through her blistered body?

Now Anjali was all alone. Now she could face none except herself, could answer no one except her own questions. Did you have a happy life? What did you have for the most part, disappointment or fulfillment?

But why disappointment? Didn't she have all that she was used to, and had hoped for since her childhood? Which intolerable quality did she have to confront in Ajit? And there was Munu, their four year old roly-poly son!

"Arre Munu, watch out. Ah, spilled the milk, you little devil"

"...You hear? The grand clearance sales are on, near the Laxing

theatre, Mrs Mohanty was saying."

" ... 0 oh-o! You have caught a cold again. You never put of sweaters. It's so cold these days! You must go inside... What should be the second again. I get you? Ginger tea or some warm salt water to gargle?"

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Events filled her moments. And each event was neatly confined to the space allotted to it. Perfectly aligned. That was Anjali's sleight of hand, and of course, her pride. No mess anywhere, not a speck of dirt.

Somewhere along her journey to womanhood, she had chosen this to be her goal, all she would ever want in life. Perhaps she had not chosen it consciously; perhaps it had come to her naturally. Everything had to contain beauty and symmetry: the body, clothes, the food served on the table, bed and the bedroom, walls of the living-room, flower pots in the garden, conversations and relationships. If anything ugly or messy got in the way, she knew the art of getting rid of it, as she would a knot of thistles. If she could not get rid of it, she would mend it—scraping a bit here, polishing a bit there, and everything became beautiful again.

When she was with her elder sister-in-law, she had spent all her time training her how to keep house, smoothing out her messy habits. Mr. Chadda, Ajit's boss, admired Anjali. He was a tall, broad shouldered, fair gentleman; but his mouth frothed at the corner when he spoke.

Anjali always invented an excuse to avoid visiting his house. Coming to think of Ajit himself. In their early days, whenever they went out, he greased his hair with hair-oil. His trousers always hung above his ankles or were so loose that creases stood out as he fastened a waist-belt to them. Anjali took care of everything personally. She gave up wearing stilettos after her marriage so that they looked a perfect couple when they walked together. She formed the habit of reading newspapers, so she could talk with Ajit about everything under the sun.

When her own elder sister nagged her husband, Anjali found it so shamefully vulgar!

But yes, it was not as though she could guide and control everything in her life as she would have liked to. Disturbing moments did appear from nowhere like sudden, frightening jumps from a tree. At times some queer helplessness numbed her, clouded her vision, and she surrendered before it out of sheer panic, giving in to an indefinable disgust.

Trapped inside the corpse of a body, Anjali's flawless mind looked back to her past. Those were the days of endless adornments, incessant worship of beauty. At some point she had also learnt to accept the rights of those unsolicited moments that crept into her days. She had acknowledged their power to break the rules of her

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games and disrupt them as and when they pleased. And during her half awake moments she would even be told that one of those moments was going to snatch away her life from her grip!

The question again: What is it? Which moments are they? Come,

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point them out then!

Anjali's mind was worn out. So too was her brain, which had been feeding on her body. Yet, this is the opportune moment. What else is there now to fend for, to beg before God? So let me rather have one look at the ghosts that were scaring me from behind the bushes.

That's right. The most fulfilling were the moments of bedecking, preserving and watching spellbound your own relation in the mirror, the moments of plucking flowers in the garden. She was perhaps very small then, a cool, fragrant breeze was blowing after a brief shower. Anjali came out of the house. The blossoming vine of French Jasmine twined around the pillar on the verandah up to the roof full of flowers. As she stood on her toes and pulled down a bunch, something stuck on to her skin, a lump of paste. The crushed mass of a slimy caterpillar!

Later, many a time, she had felt that the innocent worm grazing on the leaves of the flowering creeper that rainy evening had not deserved the shudder that had penetrated her to the marrow. Maybe it was after all the paste was from a rotten flower stalk. With a jerk she had wiped her hand on the wall before knowing what it was. But she abhorred the moment all the same whenever it came back to her; no amount of reasoning or ethics could even slightly

lessen its intensity.

The moment crept back, again and again, with or without purpose, cause or hope, or apprehension, at times with justification

at others without rhyme or reason.

It spoilt her bright days of joy at times, when she expected it the least. The day she discovered that a new life was throbbing inside her, one early morning, she had quaked with the same shuddering tremor. The fresh, beautiful dawn around her suddent lost its lustre like a fresh fruit rotting. Her stomach was churning and a sour and bitter liquid had surged into her mouth. She had bent over the wash-basin to vomit drops of bitter saliva. Were he insides, in their twisting and coiling, revolting against the newcome who had intruded into the limits of her being, even before the start of a relationship?

Anjali, who was always eager to welcome the morning who

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expected harobbing he same suddenly churning. She has were he ewcome the staff

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she woke up, had wobbled back to her bed after washing her face. The bed had felt as if some long suffering patient had lain there; moth-eaten, stinking, but a comforting shelter.

The moment is short-lived. Once it leaves everything clears away. The morning gets fresh, more beautiful than ever. A sense of gratitude infuses her body and mind for some unexpected boon received.

The moment keeps returning. At her acquaintance with the tiny newcomer, helped on to the bed by the nurse. A soft thing of wrinkled pink flesh. The small mouth opening at the slightest body contact, groping blindly. The only self expression, that. Of hunger, of life, a demand on the other beyond reason or conscience. Alas! She was swayed by the same horrifying shudder once more.

The moment of malice retreats as it comes. Not easy to forget. It has to be pushed hard into oblivion. The feeling of shame and sin lingers on. But once again easy waves come over, bringing in fulfillment, love, compassion and joy.

The faithful, perfect life companion. Malice comes unannounced and throws everything into splinters: his cool confidence, his assertiveness, his modesty, his uncontroversial goodness. His small claims, big compromises. Even his capacity to take back his claims with unflinching calm. Can it be assessed or foretold: the unsettling moment?

Moment of malice. Unmistakable, like the symptoms of a known disease. Breaks in like a dusty sandstorm, permeates through one's eyes and takes you over. You cannot see a thing then. You want to chuck it out to free yourself, but you see you are chucking out your life along with it. You grow cold and insensate as you live the moment, but it's really hard to turn down its challenge. You shed everything for it like you would your soiled and mud-soaked clothes.

In the beginning, Bikash was like a new intoxicating island in the map of her life. This was Anjali's first encounter of its kind. As though a hidden niche had been found within the familiar boundaries of the house. He had the expression of a small boy watching the rainbow, desperate to pluck a flower. His unheeding, blind frenzy had no common point with the small, measured steps of the adult world.

Anjali knew beauty in a different form, that did not come only with her art of adornment, but blossomed on its own by the morning sunlight.

But then moments after touching it she saw how it changed,

Yashodhara Mishra / 97

transformed into something different, almost fearsome within minutes, like your own reflection in a asymmetrical mirror. A ferocious dwarf took over the child in him. No infatuation for rainbows; only greed written all over his face, the same greed-of-hunger of that worm that evening, and ugly, like the crooked, deformed flower which had looked so beautiful in its slender stalk!

Was this that final moment, that primordial dark time that was waiting for Anjali? There was no escaping that moment, no way of relief, for the worm multiplied into a hundred, and then into a million, and a million turned into trillions right before her eyes. They were all around her, over the boughs, the buds, the earth, clothes, her body. It engulfed everyone, Ajit, Munu, kitchen, Papa and Ma.

The moment did recede, but had left its permanent and indelible imprint. This is the final figure then, whose dark form she had been trying to visualize all these days. Whom she had dreaded like a hobgoblin.

She could see herself, in the horror and disbelief in the faces of the dear ones who came to visit her. Then she saw her face reflected in the stainless steel containers beside her bed. A shriek of horror turned mute behind her toungue.

The figure she had worshipped all life, is now one with the dark forms that were haunting her in nightmares. No more fear then, from anyone, anything.

The eyes were closed. No worry now.

The body had once been beautiful. It was now a grotesque corpse.

Translated from Oriya by the Author

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POETRY

Meena Kandasamy

Ekalavyan

This note comes as a consolation:

You can do a lot of things with your left hand. Besides, fascist Dronacharyas warrant left-handed treatment.

Also, you don't need your right thumb, to pull a trigger or to hurl a bomb.

The Flight of Birds

"a poem should be wordless as the flight of birds."

-Archibald Macleish, Ars Poetica.

birds don't sing in their flight

for them flying is a muse they compose mid-air weave agnostic verse

sneering haughtily at our absurdity
as they float over our meaningless mosques and churches
and those patrolled international borders
and other disputed sites

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

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where the guns go bang bang bang all the time they swing over there losing their birdegos (ego is difficult to retain in mid-flight) wondering about and watching men plucking out and quashing the lives of other men and women and poor helpless children and they shed a birdtear or two from there a birdtear that is lost midway due to the heat of some explosion down below some crazy fanatical bomb detonating killing instantly the people and the city and the forests and even the pitiable babybirds who are yet to learn to fly they contemplate of writing poems about a bird's egg charring before even being boiled and scratch their beaks unsure if this is a metaphor or simile or some other poetic device

o the birds have lots and lots and lots to write about o their writings will never be banned

they borrow freedom to write poems in the skythey come back pass it on to us

we take the song only brutally but at least we take the song

to take the poem to unscramble the words from the song and to put it back again as song so spontaneously that it remains the poem and the song to remember forever this refrain whose melody haunts us and to hum that refrain which preserves our sanity perhaps we need to fly

a trifle aimlessly like birds

or because we are humans six-sensed creatures with massive egos

100 / Indian Literature: 234

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and massive superegos and massive egos on the ego and because of possessing gray matter we need to feel with our red hearts than think with some unlocatable mind

we need to look deeper

into ourselves into eyes

we need to lose ourselves

then and only then

the poems will come silent wordless as the flight of birds

A Breathless Counsel

curiosity will catch you dear for you are a writer and it is your license to startle the world with a hundred thousand words instead of a dazzling smile or those occasional winks and i don't want to probe for after all you are renouncing all the time and i don't want to stop you racing against life but i have been there and i have returned and i know what happens when it takes hold of a woman yes i know what happens then but i will not tell you the answers i have sealed my lips i have learnt how not to say what i must be saying somehow i don't want to be fledging you in security for what happens with all my parenting will only be a compromise darling child instead i let you free i want you to ask the questions i want you to prick and not polish your wounds i will let you to be hurt in the face of the world i want you to learn more than what you want to learn sometimes i feel i want you to get hurt badly hurt and bleed before the world and then i shall sit back and feel my work is done for once you have known what pain is then you shall know how to preserve the fringes of happiness i want you to be alone in the ravenous world where you never know what happens next just so that you will no longer find routine to be so

Meena Kandasamy / 101

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despicable and amidst that pervading fuzziness you shall long for a anchor for all your dreams only realizing much later that you are you safety you are your ultimate but till then you might screech and scream but when you retain your temperament you will find that life will always lie waiting like an hungry beast and at each turn you take i wis you learn the greater horrors and now i confess darling i want you hurt because i want to watch you fight and fight and fight i want you to pull together those moonbeams of hope i want you to throp precariously i want you to be living on the edge i want you to lear the thousand one ways in which you can melt the boundaries of saturation called death and the emptiness of life and the fidgetiness of what might be called love i want you to lose i want you to win but some day i want you to be free

from the series 'The Eighth Day of Creation'

Untitled-6

Technically, it is a torrential downpour.

You stand by the window watching the rain wash the world.

A small schoolboy comes running out of nowhere, drenched and dancing in oblivion.

And for the first time in your seventeen-year-old life you think of becoming a mother.

Untitled -7

Even chalk-dust has settled down.

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You prance about, always the last one to leave school because your home is just a stone's-throw away.

You linger. You look into empty classrooms expecting fairies and naughty gnomes to pop up. They might have stories to tell you, secrets to share.

One day you see Shamshed, all alone, only he doesn't see you watching him. One year your senior, a rank holder, orator-in-aspirated-Hindi, football player.

Shamshed, on all fours.
Shamshed, with thrown-away food.
Shamshed, swallowing discarded leftovers.

That day, you stopped staying late.

Nothing magical happens at school. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Untitled-17

Years roll by.

No longer the observer, you become an object.

You know you are a woman when other people deal with you along the outlines of your contours. It defines you, it defines them. It shuts you within a slender frame. Makes you fragile, delicate. . . . Anybody could break you, if they wanted to.

Like a trapped genie you seek to expand you strive to eat the world.... But are always returned to the glass sealed safely to perdition.

The eyes that inspect you search for a studded ring on your fourth finger a sacred chain around your neck and even stoop down to explore if you wear toe-rings. The symbols of marriage.

When will the world know that if you have a man in your life he will be the starshine in your eyes, the colour in your skin, each of your breathless word which caresses the air? The man who taught you ten thousand ways to love would have caused plenty of changes. Yes, he will own your speech and silence and sudden grace....

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Niranjan Shrotriya

The Female Sarpanch

In post-Independent India it is no tale of eves-teasing nor any comment on rampant disparities regarding women's glorification either.

This is just a casual occurrence in some simple village beyond the reach of post-modernistic womens'-lib argumentation.

It is not even an event, in root of which is Ramdei—the female sarpanch

It is just an interlude about how a woman became the head of the village.

It was merely the result of a lottery take it just a case—born of rapes, female molestation and a hazy constitution

It's nothing significant but a strange interlude of a female becoming a village sarpanch

Hence, whenever you visit her home find there Ramdei sometimes kneading the floor or patting up cow dung cakes

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or begetting children or filling hukkah

Sometimes relaxing under the sun to soothe the wounds that crack her back

She cannot come out of the threshold of her home nor is she allowed to enter the Panchayat hall for five year together in this village all went on smoothly—

rapes immolation molestation

So was it when a women ruled as P.M. for a decade and a half or so people said

It is nothing significant no need to pay heed to it.

This, basically is not a revolutionary saga about a mere woman's becoming the head of the village but merely an anecdote of a female becoming the sarpanch

Today in the wake of ensuing elections the women of the village pray to God for Ramdei's not becoming the sarpanch elect But men's praise about her knows no end.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha.

The Poem About the Sun

From the Far East, he comes as if kicked out by some show-soft babe like a red ball he comes and rambles through the court of heaven's yard

He penetrates inside the hearth conspires against the moist wood planks wages a war along with ambers

Afraid to stone-smashing hammer conceals its face amidst the clouds
Then stealthily peeps out on earth where the autumn has ripened the crops to the core

Losing its brilliance after mid-day borrows some brightness from the bulging shiny shins of the hill porters carrying the load

Thousands of the yellow flowers of the earth keep a watch on his activities and this disciplined flower-faced sun enters slowly the constantly rutted lane

When hungry, it stoops down to the sleeping mother earth and sucks the warm nectar from her breasts. Arrogant of having enjoyed mother's milk once chided by the mother earth hides amidst the clouds for three months together Outcast from play by children of this earth roams long-faced during the winter

Now, it does not matter who rotates round whom but we would better accept this fact, that his six thousand degree Celsius heat he owes to the warmth of the dwellers of the earth.

He is no strange planet but the lad brought up on this very earth. See, the infant on the other end of the globe mistook it for a butterfly and caught it. The night prevailed.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha

The Daughter (Three rhymes about the daughter)

The daughter is an ocean whatever you give her, she will return remember her or not she will drench you up to your emotional core concealing countless mysteries in her heart the daughter alone is the two-third part of our home.

When she lies tired, a-while and gazes at the roof of the house goes to sleep talking to the various shapes imprinted on the crude tiles of it

even when asleep, she is looking at that same roof her dreams revert against the roof all of a sudden she awakes doesn't even change her side, while sleeeping. The roof alone she stares at as if the roof is supported by her gaze alone.

One Vimla Chauhan is thinking about Lily Fernandez
The other is worried for Radha Sharma
Radha, who knows why Salma Qureshi is sad
And Salma equally partakes Manjeet Kaur's grief

At this end of the town if your touch disturbs on on the other far end you'll startle another.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha. 108 / Indian Literature : 234

The Market Place

From the dry edges of the drought-stricken fields, a couple of helpless eyes

look at the skies, not sky at all but a network of microwaves Whether the monsoon will come smashing against them, or will it come from across the seven seas on this magnanimous earth?

The land is ours—but theirs the sky
The womb is ours—theirs the seeds
The manure is ours—theirs the dung hills
The crown is ours—theirs the head

Welcome all, all to this large-hearted earth Weeds—welcome to the fields Waves—welcome to our hearts and soul Newspapers—welcome to our literate hands Welcome words, come sounds come medicine, welcome diseases.

Come, this country of ours is but a bazaar It is only a petty-cheap affordable commerce Welcome CNN, STAR, BBC come and overpower us all

Welcome Internet
That is what a 'global village' means
That is where the
Alsatians of New York relish and consume
the crisp, oven-hot rotis
"Made in Delhi Bujurg"

Take our perpetual and naive concerns away from us, and keep us perplexed about what will happein to Tara now, or what turn will this narrative take? Whether the commander will catch the murderer and when shall our Mihir come back alive? And when the buzzer at KBC will strike?

Niranjan Shrotriya / 109

Weigh your strength
the gait of bamboo bullock-cart against
the flying pace of hot wheel car
the melody of Raag Deepak challenging Michael Jackson's
dazzling strains
the battle of local rough newspapers
against the colourful glaze of imported page
the snacks of Bikaner vis-a-vis
the soda of Pepsi salt
The filial affection of mother versus
packed, sealed tins.

In the dumb silent bloody Mahabharata the hurt, wounded warriors shall ask the large-hearted Yudhishthir. the cause of this fake truth of life and entering this very market/bazaar Kisna will feel remorse at his pocket-picked and shall loudly bemoan "Alas! I should have read the intentions and not the good."

Amidst the clamour caused by these untamed elephants an echo of a lisping child, by the side of the cart wheel will still be heard...

"Its crown in the North is Himalayas and feet reverently washed by the ocean Hind."

There is no time for prayer but let us some ants discover.

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha.

Fanne Khan, The Guide

Forty miles away from Agra, Fanne Khan, the guide is the native of this town of red stones located amidst streets.

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The history lost in his white hair and wrinkled face makes a bye-way

The tourists follow him like a herd of ducks, Fanne Khan walks straight, like Akbar the emperor despite his bent, bowed backbone

In his invocation of mixed Hindi-Urdu-Hindi glides majestically the sixteenth century through the stairs of Fanne Khan, amidst the mob

His eyes once again shine through the shining swords drawn out of their sheaths during the second battle of Panipat in 1556

In 1564, the Hindus relieved from Jazia, the tax and in 1582 Deen-i-Ilahi prevailed narrating all this, the eyes of Fanne Khan gave the message of Suleh-E-Kul

This city, founded in 1571
not a city, but a royal, innocent, pious dream
a specimen of Iranian-Mughal-Indian architecture
"The very motive behind this Fanne Khan's being the guide"
whisper the old sires at leisure.
"This is Deewan-E-Aam" echoes the old but bold voice still
"This high seat of justice surrounded by the rectangular
arched corridors"

On it sat Akbar the Great, the compassionate king suddenly the voice of Fanne Khan chide the tourists for some crude comment The choric laughter subsides "Silence! the court is in session."

"And this Deewan-E-Khas"
on a high plinth of red stone, the edifice square
where the emperor learnt the truth of all religions
very skilfully could Fanne Khan conceal

"I1

the bitter reminiscences that his eyes reveal He looks like an angelic form in blanched robe and beard.

This is Panchmahal, the abode of queens where the queens sat viewing the kingdom's Durbar making chapatis at home

The face of Jamalo Begum dawns from the veil supported by tender grip of teeth with pride of a dame who reared two young sons and with grief of losing two dear ones

Like kaleidoscope all passes into Fanne Khan's mind

This is the palace of Birbal smart, witty with presence of mind looking like Altaf my first cousin who, these days lives in Pakistan the voice of Fanne Khan choked with grief

winds itself up hight at Darwaza Buland A symbol of victory over Khans, of bold intent hundred and thirty four feet high fusion of art of India and Iran the psalms of thrilled ecstasy can be read on Fanne Khan's exhausted countenance

"This then, my Lords, Fatehpur Sikri
that never was and could never be
It's poetry in marble carved
by Persian imagination and Indian craftsmanship
Long live the beauties of this Yamuna, Gangetic stream"
wishing thus, Fanne Khan glanced at the pigeons
sitting high on domes, white
leaving the tourists at Saleem Chishti's tomb
to fulfil their cherished well-being

The tourists return towards their bus praising the arches, galleries and windows frescoed and above all Fanne Khan's enthralling tongue which renders the place still more beautiful Fanne Khan lives the sixteenth century so well

knows not much about history,
"It does not matter if the facts are wrong
but how we present them is all that matters."

Translated from Hindi by Nutan Kulshrestha



Nonda Chatterjee

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What Was That Word, Again ...?

Coming, I heard your call, but what was that word? That elusive conglomeration of sounds Which seemed to say what I wanted to say?

It's gone, gone with the fragrance of the jasmine That wafted through the window, and, yes, coming, I know the children have to get to school, but...

The scent took me back twenty years to the room Patterned in black and white marble, the yellow jasmine, The dappling of lacy shadows on the warm brick,

To spilt ink on an ancient table covered in green baize, My aunt's severely-tried patience and my uncle's tolerance, My cousin s conspiratorial smile...

The vegetables are over-cooked, breakfast is a mess, I know, I'm impossibly late for my well-paid job, and, They will throw me out one day, you have said so, not once.

But how can I go till I have captured the sounds that Were Life, twenty years ago, The purple Jacaranda that matched the dear one's purple pain,

The sunshine of her glance when I went home, The soldier, shouldering all with a smile that never faltered, The little girl, hair bobbing,

Skating in and out of her enchanted world,

Sharing her own pain with her imagined twin, and Making others laugh with her nonsense...

How does one articulate the complete inadequacy To deal with life, the inability to assuage, to alleviate, To expiate a severe lapse, to communicate in words,

To those who are no more, and those who are? Oh God, I know I'm hopelessly behind with everything, But, what was that word, again?

Epilogue

once.

pain,

They cut me down but I leaped up high, I told them I would never, never die.
The cat has nine lives but I have ten.
This is my message for mice and men—

They put me in the ground, I came out as a tree, They burnt me in the fire, I came out as Sree, They drowned me in the water, I came out as the sun, They threw me in the sky, as the moon I shone!

They cut me into pieces and they scattered my parts; These fell on the earth and turned into hearts. Each heart had a voice and a tongue to match; I spoke through them but there was none to catch!

They made me the plaything of king, wight and fool; They took my body and made it a tool To lure their enemies, placate their friends, To further their complex and material ends.

They forgot that I am fire, air and earth.
They forgot that I hold the nuptery of birth.
They forgot my roles as mother, daughter, wife.
They forgot that without me there is no life!

The war will continue till day meets night, Till body meets soul, till vision meets sight,

Nonda Chatterjee / 115

Till purush and prakriti stop looking askance And, as equals, take their place in the cosmic dance.

So awake and take heed of my battle-cry: They can kill me but I will never, never die... For, eternally reborn, I will soar up high, Permeate every atom of earth and sky!

Poetry is Not...

Poetry is not gimmickry, gimcrack and false, Nor words artificially fashioned with artifice, Not pain, nor joy, nor 'I' Aiming to strike aimless, cynical chords, Nor deliberately, intellectually, obscure, Hoping to obfuscate rather than illumine The death of the soul....

Look for poetry in the flight of birds
Searching for sanctuary in killing-fields,
Trees in cities, leafing and flowering
Through the grime that chokes them,
Droplets of water on the lashes of a dark girl bathing
In a forbidden, white pool,
A song long forgotten that haunts the memory,
An old woman's tears for the bus she missed to the other side...

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Wring the living soul, fashion it in life's blood, And you may find...

Priya Sarukkai Chabria

Secret Chamber

The wooden cupboard with double-door mirrors holds my image, pentimenti pressed into its face, into

its ground glass, into its mercury-lined back. It has known me since I was four. Often, I've thought these images might spill

as shimmering shadows on ancestral floors and lace my ankles to their lips. Once, snared by loss

I had curled within the cupboard's darkness, breathing in its smell, touching its grain. That's when I found

the secret chamber in which to hide remembrance. I was eleven: my pet had died

quarantined in a distemper ward that quaked with light. I said goodbye

to his shape, to his tongue, to his weight. Lifting his small shadow

curled around my heart

side...

I had buried it here. Last night my hands remembered the chamber.

Within lay dog hair in cellophane wraps, neatly folded in a time trap.

I wonder

if the girl with sad curious hands visits me through bends of time. Or do I slip back into her as a series of reflections?

In the wormhole of life, where lies the secret chamber? In the past or the present?

Which is more real, and which, more reflection?

Falling

-for Varun Sahni

I sit wide-eyed and unseeing as his voice tells me of his work, of the everyday wonders in physics that bend

the imagination to a site near grace. We range across ten-dimensional space

into dark energy, scurry through wormholes to emerge into the quantum world, into minute degrees of discretion.

Here's a narrative: Around each nucleus electrons orbit, 118 / Indian Literature : 234 eac in

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each a senseless circling in its own ambit, each electron separated

from the next by a quantum—that is both space and energy field. (So far so good. He's trying hard to communicate over lemon tea, and I'm getting it.) Next instant—

collision. (Drama on a subatomic scale.) Another atom bombards the one we were discussing. A lowly electron flies off the loop, hitting

a higher sphere, shooting into the outer margins of energized third or fourth quantum hoops. But the electron that's kicked up

wants to fall, he says, fall back to its low energy, close-to-the-centre place. (Don't we wish to return, I think, to sink into darkness; descend, give up the fight?) But as it falls

the electron sheds a wake of light.

In this reality fall is grace. I weep into my hands; he looks bemused, then nods.

Quantum physics is a strangely luminous space.

from Poems from Babylon and Persia, 2006: Salma, pi-dog of Baghdad

Americans are kind.
They leave blood on the streets
for us to lick,
and morsels of human flesh

stuck to charred clothing.

ne

They return us to our ancestors: Wolves.

Blue Vase

—for Amma

Glazed turquoise blue, a colour so intense you knew it was turned in a place far from water, under desert skies. My mother brought it home and unwrapped its blue shape: Bowl-bottomed, thick-necked, wide-mouthed. It was unique; but beyond that, nothing special.

Hummingbird blue, gem blue, yet large and coarse, it coursed through the phosphorescent dreams of my childhood and those of a family fragmenting. Once, it held sunflowers in our midst. Once my sister almost broke it—playing ball in the hall.

Our eyes filled with it. At day so bright and lonely it silenced the sea outside our home; its blues pooled at night, that's when it shrank like a stone. It sat on a walnut sideboard that now sits, I think, in my father's new house.

They left, each one of them, like rivers seeking beds. I bored a hole into its clay, thinking it should hold more light to shoo the darkness from that sun-filled place. I turned it into a lamp stand, permanently capped. It glowed artificially all day, all night.

Then I too packed, and moved, and have packed and moved six times since. Somewhere I lost its shade. Or did it loosen and roll away one day—the bulb, the holder and the cone of turquoise jute?

Now the blue vase holds neither flowers nor light. But air—that drains through the hole at its base, and brims over its open rim.



Sanjukta Dasgupta

The Art of Lying

"What is a lie" Asked the little girl

"It is that which is not" Said her sad mother

"Can't catch a lie, then" Queried the restless girl

"But they lie like truth, my girl" Replied her mother

"Who are they-tell me" Asked the excited little one

"They look like any of us" Smiled the woman—

"Presidents, priests, peddlers of hope Philanderers, confidence tricksters, pedagogues

The good, bad and mad are entwined Good hearts, ugly minds or the reverse"

"I am scared mother" Said the little girl

"why did you bring me to such a world Now I'll have to suffer like you and others I'll Ho

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Said As

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Who mes saty

Who care like

Whe it's a mag

Whe tread like Yet, I'll have to suffer if I love and trust How can I live if I can't trust?"

"Life is a school with endless classrooms You will learn as you live"

Said her sad but sure mother As her tears fell like dew, on the leaves of the book of life.

Where There is No Love

Where there is no love stretches a desert oasis-free

Where there is no love alluring boutique of synthetic flowers seductive dead plastic for sale

Where there is no love life is a playground hurt is a lethal hurtling ball

Where there is no love mesmeric falsehood like scaly hoods of cobras satyric leer and chuckle of slippery rattle snakes

Where there is no love carelessness terrifies like guns in Baghdad

Where there is no love it's a monotone of me and I magnum opus of Narcissus

Where there is no love. treacherous lies and tricks torment like sharp thorns under the bare feet Yet, somewhere, if there is love

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a crucified bird wings the lively air a resurrected Christ, or invincible Phoenix

Saliva

Never before had such a viscous and vitriolic fluid flowed from lolling tongues
Fortune hunters panted in lascivious heat
History sat up traumatized
Art and artifice nonpareil
Covetousness as never before
Such cruel, scheming crusader's zeal such brazen equivocation
was never recorded in the tragic files of Time.

Fair and Foul, Good and Evil
God and Devil
in an explosive mesh of chaos
saliva cascaded down
scorching the earth where it fell
Streams of blood flowed into the ancient rivers
Charred roses stared petrified in the spring gardens
Desire drooled for the welling oil in that raped terrain.

Suddenly every threatened green blade of grass a lethal knife blade every boulder in the desert a fist of fury
Till the saliva dried up the tongues hung out like fattened, drunken leeches dripping blood.

My Poems

My poems, my poems
Is that a narcissistic jingle
Is it the title of my new book
Is it a folder name

Or the name of countless files within a very pale yellow folder untouchable, except for some pats on the screen—to see but not to hold unless emitted through the jaws of the printer.

My poems
are like singing birds on wing
exploring the overarching azure lawns
My poems
sometimes pop into the cobalt blue
of the evening sea on the Orissa coast
only to pop up again next dawn
glistening and drenched in orange-red

My poems
linger like a drop of dew
in the corner of weary eyes
for those cold in the sun's embrace
My poems
rain like the rays of the moon
ever elusive like a deer at play
My poems
can be crutches for a gipsy
on a journey to nowhere

My poem
is a teardrop congealed
concealed like a drop of pearl
within the moist sun-shy oyster
Pried open it becomes
just a poem
Texture and structure
just rhetoric in prosodic chains
or the more rigorous shackles—
chained free verse awaiting liberation.

As the words reach the world spinning in wild wonder whirling through the planet touching a heart

caressing a mind
coaxing a nod
a flutter of butterfly wings
somewhere, anywhere
links in an invisible chain
that is after all invincible
And then my poems
no longer remain just mine.

Illusions

No, don't call me again to that fiendish feast of tandooried dreams
The teasing turns of the rotisserie as the impaled become more succulent in seconds
Sizzlers crackling over slow fires
The turning of the spikes
The spluttering of fire as drops of melting fat make flames knife through the air Wild, sharp stutters of fiery rage Maggots of passion to dust of dreams inevitably.

Rain and I

Last night I heard the rain dancing on my roof top humming a tune as it tap-danced on the concrete floor I had to see the rain that woke me from my possible sleep

I stretched out my arms Raining jets of water

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drenched me like
no hi-tech shower can ever do
Where are the rain-heavy dark clouds
the inky sky and the streaking silver flashes
in dazzling psychedelic designs
and the rumbling of thunderous drums
within the strict space of a swanky bathroom?

Rain and I
in a monsoon re-union
danced and sang
in an intimate soaking togetherness
The roof became a lush green field
The midnight blue sky
a perforated canopy
through which the jets of healing water
poured into my veins

Leaves of grass grew under my feet Swaying rain-washed leafy branches the very tall Krishnachura and Bakul trees peeped curiously at me as I danced on the roof top at midnight A solo performance with cosmic flash bulbs and the rumble of unseen drums

And my own very tall at least thirty-feet Araucaria planted when it was a ten inch slight sapling swayed and rippled in the rhythmic music of the monsoon rain
It joined a chorus of silent protest along with the neglected neighbourhood trees
The uncared for pavement dwellers

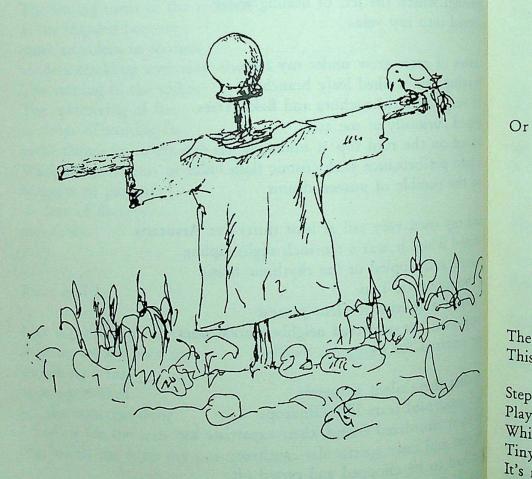
together these silent witnesses shed mournful tears like raindrops for their murdered friend, their expatriate kin the one and only spectacular rain tree that had to be chopped and carted off for a high-rise, a high powered human habitat

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Or

Rain and I sang a dirge for the beautiful dumb rain tree that couldn't scream as it was killed We of course were struck dumb too for it was a tree on someone else's private property favoured or liquidated in one fell stroke like a dependent wife!



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Sirpi Balasubramaniam

River in a Hamlet

Wherefrom it flows This river?

> Smashing Silence of Mountains? Impairing Robes of clouds? Seeping out Babbles of woods

Or

From me? Opening Fount-eyes of my soul Raising Hair-thrills on my chest Scenting Flowers and grass in my veins Submerging My entire "Self" Wholly dissolving me

Therefrom it flows This river.

Stepping on a moving serpent Playing flute by lips Whirling and dancing Tiny 'Krishnas' are here too It's my 'Yamuna.'





Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Pre-yards of Harishchandra
To lie on eternal rest
Burnt remains of the dead
Laid sacred in placenta pot
Stored within sodden wombs
Are with this river too
It's my 'Ganga'1...

Not on war with Neighbour state Smoothly runs this brook It is my Cauveri

This Salty river meets
With another that of milk
It's my life's salt and
So is my mother's breast-milk
Unread histories and
Unfinished 'memoirs'
All in its shores...

Moulding rocks into
Sculpture
Is it's trait
In subtlety these waves are
Moving paintings during day;
By night,
Foot-rings dancing to
Tunes of Nadaswara
Of yonder breeze.

Yourself a feed Your fish is also food I too yearn to be Provender to thee

A screwpine mat, this is I lingered thereupon.

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^{1.} A water game repeating the act of climbing on one's shoulder and just ing into water, one after another, by a group of persons

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A mirror, I saw my face 'Veena' of my love.
Honeymoon suite
Of my solitude.
Courtyard of my sighs

Massive tear dropping out Of its own weight

Silvery wrapper Of my thoughts Drain of my woes Ocean of my joys

It's my blue blood Umblical cord Of my first poem Edict of my last command

That whimpering silence
Between letters
Of this mighty verse
that strolls upon shoulders of 'Time'
Is me.

Translated from Tamil by A.Abdul Jaleel

Rock Craft

Over rocks, This river brawls on and on Playing 'green horse game.'1

Is this river
A sister to Thungabhadra
Of Humpi town
Who, with love
Lay embraced to
The stones on its shores?

r and ju

What's the age-long mystery This river has to whisper To chunks of rocky shoots Of yonder she-giant 'Nachi' Mountains With her side-strips and Steady steep roots. Straighten herself On a slumbering mood?

* * *

Lay stretched their legs,
These 'Kandi' Buddha' seers.
Pilgrims fully clad in
'Bhasma' of crane's excretas
Princesses with foam-pearl
Necklaces adorned.

Hard-core fogyish Bald-heads with green tufts Grown thereon

Those foster-mothers Splitting new hairlines To the water heads

Those fortress walls
That boost the fancies
Of shabbily-dressed princes
Duelling with soft-palm swords

Shallow cellar holes
Sheltering water snakes.
Seats set fourth for
Young rural lovers to
Enjoy themselves, through
All five sweet senses.

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^{2.} A Buddhist centre in Sri Lanka.

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They are silent 'Maestros'
Imparting tender waves,
In raising bangle tones.
Little waves to wiggle
Cute tender toes
And mighty billows rumble
Shuddering thunder noise.

Spreading blue shades around, Fadging yellow all along, Shrouded in deep green veil, Finished in red layer tinge On this hardened rock Of deep-set black

The palette Which Van Gogh scattered Sprouting all these hues?

Whose curse petrified This fine 'Craft Complex' That challenges the pride. Of Michaelangelos?

Oh wonder craftsman!
Who with wave chisel
Carved out these rock sculptures
Unlike Colarado had
Turned out its sandy crafts

Why you walked off? Beckoning them all 'Be here.'

Translated from Tamil by A.Abdul Jaleel

Three Dreams

In dream world
At wonderlands.
Trees with golden leaves ripped off.
In silver tendrils sprawled
Diamond flowers, bloodstone fruits.

On blue thin boughs
With sapphire beak, emerald wings
and ruby eyes
A love-bird song.

Unlike crumples of fan With folds up and down. Curled and straight At another branch A lightning serpent with Pea-eyes glittering Danced on and on.

When bird's song subside the snake slipped as fountain-flow To another branch

Slowly slowly
Song, when halted,
the snake fluttered as whip
Fell on the ground
Head and tail severed
Vanished off antipodes.

Then...
Gold of leaves
Blackened and
Turned as lead
Silver of creepers
Changed as tin.
Odour of burnt skins
Of flowers,

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Mons Open Towa Drops of flood
At pedicles of fruits...
Bird that stopped it song
Turned as wooden doll
Fragmented snake
Transformed to stone shingles

Golden spored
Sandy lawn
Flocked, all over
With tiny birds.
At shades of waves
Of cotton-roll spray
Marks of red-mix feet.

A flickering blue fish shall Piercing sea Blow up Snatching it with ruby beak A bird shall scoot upwards.

A silver fish may dance Stretched, a needle beak May grab it off.

Steadily and slowly Fishes may flatten themselves. Strips of carnage appear At edge of tender beaks.

The, belly of sea may tear off Bulky whales emerge. With its tail end Splashing out water sky high.

Monster fishes may Open wide their mouths Towards distant land. The second section of

At sandy shores All broken beaks. Torn pinions and heaps Of tender bones.

Flossy moths of
Deep yellow wings
Golden bees pecked
On thorny plants
Rows of 'rail fly' worms
Glowing peacock wings, all
Flowing from the match-box
Concealed under his pillow.

Coloured insects with
Lime powder on cheeks
Dissolved in the blue of skies.
Playing sitar with tiny legs
Circling ears,
Bees flew round and round
Floating to music notes.

Rows of wheel-shaped worms Worn in peacock plumes Twiddled over his legs Crawled along his thigh Itching on his hip Raising thrills on his chest Ascended through his Moustache strip

Entered his nose pool When breath got blocked Woke up, he startled Opening his eyes

Vaikarai river was Sweeping him off "He felt"

Translated from Tamil by A.Abdul Jaleel 136 / Indian Literature: 234

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Making of a soup

Certainly anyone can make a soup. Tomatoes, onions, green chillies, Black pepper,flakes of garlic and salt. Near the hot hearth. Sweating.

It will take a while to get cooked.

Must be careful when stirring.

Lumps should not get formed.

Forget not,

The fragrance of cut coriander leaves.

After that we sit around the table.
Four guests, sunk in four different trains of thought.
Four escapees, four past mistakes.
As croutons we add to the soup
Our great dreams, that we are not able to get rid of.
We are waiting for the soup to become cool enough.

The enticing hotness of the soup,
Its attractive red tint,
Four guests, sunk in four different trains of thought.
Four new steps into coming days.

Now we are starting to eat the soup. On red horses we cross
Deserts of empty stomachs.
Perhaps we are no more just four.

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Behind us there stretches
A vast multitude of faceless ones
Asking for the soup.
From four to forty, to four hundred four thousand.
Forty thousand, four lakhs.
The multitude grows and grows.
Like the endless dreams of the hopeful.

Certainly we can improve upon the soup. By adding to it Love, commitment, hope, dreams, And our never-ending labour of love.

Translated from Malayalam by T.K. Ramachandran

Green

We tend to note down The body stats of beauty Gliding through the ramps.

But
The sea of shame,
The sky of neglect,
The stars of the orphan.
They remain beyond the ken of scales.

Who was that?
The girl next door, the stranger, the childhood girlfriend,
Paid and not paid,
Tempted and not tempted.

Oh girl, whose tears have dried up,
I send to you this
On the swift steeds of the wind:
The yellow sun that peeps out of the dark monsoon clouds.
Dig out and eat the roots of the lightnings,
Go, drink up the rain that falls like a deluge.

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We will never become clods of earth or fallen leaves*
And we will never visit Varanasi.
Today we will plant
A dark green peppercorn
In the earth sweetened by springrain.

Translated from Malayalam by T.K. Ramachandran

A children's story recounts on a pilgrimage undertaken by two friends, a clod of earth and a fallen leaf to Varanasi. As they tredged in the long journey, there came a gust of wind. Don't worry, said the clod. It perched on the top of the leaf lest it be blown away. As they went along, the rains came. Dont worry, said the leaf and it covered and protected the clod. But as they were approaching Varanasi, there came a summerstorm with wind and rains. The clod got dissolved in the rain and the leaf was blown away we know not where.

Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu Literature

Javed Akhtar

The Progressive Writers' Association—as soon as one hears these four words, one's mental horizon is illumined with a myriad of stars—Faiz, Majaz, Krishan Chander, Sardar Jafri, Ismat Chughtai, Sahir, Kaifi, Jan Nasar, Akhtar, Rajender Singh Bedi, Majrooh—there are innumerable names which shine like a galaxy and leave to wonderstuck.

'There as a time when all lived together!'

Oh what memories come flooding—the fading evening light through the small chink in the prison cell, the beautiful caressing hand of the moonlight on the lonely terrace, the abject poverty of a youth the ravishing beauty of a widow, the pain writ large on the face of Kaluthe scavenger, the haphazard life of Shamman inching ahead in a crooked line, the Punjab in flames, wounds and scars on the fair and flowery body of Kashmir, a girl squatting all alone in the untild courtyard of her motley abode staring longingly at her wedding dress whose fate has been sealed forever thanks to the polities of Partition homeless and destitute shoeshine boys and newspaper hawkers, slogar shouting revolutionaries banging their head against the walls of store the bodies of martyrs burning like wax, someone beholding the from a unique perspective, someone embarks on a journey all alone soon to find himself to be part of a caravan. All these references at the famous ghazals, nazams and short stories of the Progressive writers.

We need to ponder over this movement—who were the people associated with it? What did they set out to do? What could the achieve? To what extent were they successful, if they failed what we the reasons for it? We have the

the reasons for it? We have to ponder.

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We are told that the publication of Angaray and later the meeting of a few forward-looking young writers in a London restaurant could be seen as the starting point of the movement. I feel nothing gets started unless there are conditions for it to happen. If we wish to comprehend the genesis of its tone and temper, we will have to turn pages of history and identify conditions and circumstances that brought about the birth of the movement. On the one hand, we will have to look carefully at the impact of the British stranglehold on India and on the other, the changing economic system in Europe and how it was affecting the world.

In England, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the feudal system was loosing its grip. Capitalism had become the new order of the day; new changes were coming about in the equations between capitalism, production and labour. Though the basis of the erstwhile feudal system rested on exploitation, in the new industrial society as

well, exploitation touched a new nadir.

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Novel and innovative ways of exploitation were employed. The feudal system despite its attendant evils was still a system in which the peasants and farmers were responsible for production and thus however tenuous, a relationship existed. The industrial system brought this affinity to an end. In the feudal system whose mainstay was agriculture there were only two classes of people—the landowner and the peasant. Exploitation was simple and direct. But the capitalist society in order to run its economic exploitative enterprise needed some literate and educated people as well. Consequently between the capitalist and the workers a new class of people emerged—the educated middle class. That's another matter that in days to come it was the same middle class from whose ranks there arose people who espoused the cause of the worker. But this happened much later!

At the beginning of the industrial era, there were no laws to safeguard the interests of the workers, and the capitalists were dead against enacting any. A worker would work upto 18 hours a day and was paid a paltry amount that could only help him survive and the 6 hour break was given so that he could work for another 18 hours.

Obviously there was no question of pension or any other kind of fund, no off days and on top of it, this blatant exploitation was being justified phisophically! Adam Smith (1723 - 1790) has argued in his world famous book *The Wealth of Nations* that the economic matters be absolutely delinked from political. He thought that it would be best if business and other economic activities were free of political interference.

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Another economics expert, David Ricardo (1772-1823) put fort the view that a capitalist should have the freedom to produce only those goods for which he had sufficient resources and labour. This was production would cost less. The capitalist should also be free to sel his goods to any country without any let or hindrance. Ricard favoured open markets throughout the world. Today's globalization seems akin to his view! Herbert Spencer, another economic thinker was totally against state interference in business. He has vehement opposed all such laws, which sought to protect the right of the worker

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Thus not only labour was being exploited unashamedly, all such exploitative measures were being defended with unabashed vigour, Sud a situation was bound to have repercussions. When a booklet first made its appearance in 1848, little did anyone realize that it was destined to have far reaching impact on all spheres of human life and civilization and that each and every nation of the world would either accept it or reject it but there would be no escape from being affected by it. Whi could imagine that the words of this booklet would echo for centurie to come. This was the Communist Manifesto.

Some ninety years later a young Urdu poet who used to write romantic verse read the same Communist Manifesto. This is what he reaction was in a letter:

> One day Sahabzada Mahmuduzzafar gave me a thin booklet and asked me to go through it and advised caution since it was declared unlawful. It was the Communist Manifesto and I read it in a single sitting. I felt as if someone had given me the key to the treasure trove of mystery. That's how my interest in Socialism and Marxism was initiated. Then I read Lenin's works. Later I read books about the Soviet society by revolutionary writers. About that time the Indian Progressive Writers Association came into being.

The incident Faiz Ahmed Faiz has referred to in his letter 100 place in 1935. Post World War I, the long shadow of fascism in li and Nazism in Germany could be clearly discerned. In the last pho of the war the Bolshevik Revolution had already taken place. The can be opposing points of view about it being inherently fraught contradiction but the Russian revolution gave a new courage to helpless labourers caught in the stranglehold of capitalism. It gave the a new daring to dream about a better life free from all shackles, while enslaved them. The PWA was an offshoot of such noble and lot ideals.

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Understanding this International background of the PWA is all important but we need to put it in perspective and view it in the context of the historical, social, political and economic conditions of our own

Because of the British hold on India, the country's intellectuals and reformers adopted two differing, albeit, opposite viewpoints. One view, whose proponents were the likes of Raja Rammohun Roy, Jyoti Ba Phule and later reformers, was that English education is all too essential and hence they advocated it with fervour. One thing we should be clear about at this point is that Raja Rammohun Roy stressed the importance of English at a time when our rulers had not even thought about it. Lord Macaulay's Minutes of Education appeared full two years after Raja Rammohun Roy's passing away. There was a world of difference between the two. While Raja Rammohun Roy's espousal of English education was for the propagation of a scientific and objective temperament and eradication of religious superstition and other social evils, Macaulay through English education desired to create a middle class which could become part of the ruling administrative machinery.

The other school of thought comprised orthodoxy. They opposed Raja Rammohun Roy tooth and nail. On a close appraisal it seems that they neither despised the British nor the English language but were bitterly opposed to the reform that Raja Rammohun Roy was endeavoring to introduce in a traditional and orthodox society.

Raja Rammohun Roy had pleaded for Modern English education in the early part of the 19th century. On the other hand Muslims didn't spare a thought for it till 1857. It was only after 1857 that Sir Syed and his friends initiated the Aligarh movement. In turn, they met with stiff resistance from Muslim revisionists who drew inspiration from the Wahabi Movement.

Sir Syed's movement also had its share of opponents. Contemporaries like the satirist Akbar Allahabadi made him the butt of jokes in many of his verses. (To what extent the Syed was rightly guided, did he know that the path he had chosen was laden with pits and falls). Akbar wrote a famous quatrain for his son:

Ishrati forgot all the joys of home and family love. Once in London he broke all his promises and vows.

His new taste for cake and restaurants of London Made him forget the festival of Eid and the homemade vermicelli.

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I would like to pose a question here which I failed to answer you too give it a thought. Akbar, who had so many suspicions and doubts about western education and in fact looked down upon it; here was his son enjoying and having a pleasurable time in London devour. ing cake and developing a distaste for the traditional homemade vermice Why did Akbar allow his son to go to the West? This kind of dichotomy in attitude is not confined to Akbar alone. Even today, in our country the flag-bearers of Hindi, who denounce English in the strongest terms and consider it to be the last symbol of enslavement send their own children to English-medium schools and later to the US, UK and Australia. Even the children of those who are not willing to effect any changes in the syllabi of madrasas, study not in madrasa but other main-line schools. I beg your pardon for this digression, let's now go back to the Aligarh Movement.

Apart from arousing consciousness for education, Sir Syed and his dedicated band of followers also initiated the process of a rethin on certain Islamic principles. The writings of people like Sir Syel Mohsin-ul Mulk and Chiragh Ali contain a liberal and scientific interpretation of Islamic beliefs. However, the Aligarh Movement did m meet with any success on this front, but it did manage to creater mindset among the upper and middle classes which later on proved

be congenial for progressive thinking and ideas.

Hali is also a part of Sir Syed's band. His Preface to Poetry! a document of great importance. Some of his arguments did not fin favour with some people but the historical significance of this treats cannot be denied; Hali has talked about Urdu poetry and the need to reform in it, particularly in ghazal. He was sternly against hackneys and oft-repeated cliches in the classical Urdu ghazal—the candle and the moth; the flower and the nightingale; the cup and the goblet, the low and the beloved. He advocated the need for purpose and norms of soci value in literature. This way Hali and his close associate Mohd. Hust Azad can be termed as the precursors of the Progressive Movement The duo had settled in Lahore after 1857 and there they organize Mushairas not on a given verse or metre but on a specific subject which the poet had to compose poems. The first of these symposian held in 1874. Thus themes diction, imagery and idioms enriched by verse. The poet was enabled to look beyond his own personal long. and desires.

So that there is no misunderstanding on this score, two this need to be clearly stated. Hali and Azad may be considered to precursors of the PWM but were in no way its founders. We will do

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upon t poetry concer and ev about poetry cern w Nazeer runs tl

are rep

Apart celebra and the upon the marked difference between form and temper of the Natural upon the Mali and Azad and that of the PWM. Secondly the social concerns voiced by Hali and Azad were not new to Urdu poetry. Each and every significant poet from Qul Qutub Shah to Ghalib has written about the social conditions of his time. In fact, there is a form in Urdu poetry, Shaher Aashoob, in which contemporary issues of social concern were versified. Most classical poets have written Aashoob, but Nazeer and Sauda earned unparallelled fame. One of Sauda's pentagons runs thus:

> Kharab hain wo imaraat kiya kahon khuch tujh paas Ki jin key dekhe se jati rahi hai bhook aur piyaas Aur ab jo dekho to dil hoi zindigi se udaas Bajaye gul chamano mein kamar kamar hai ghaas Kahi sutoon para hai kahin marghol

(How shall I tell you of the miserable plight of those buildings, the very sight of which made the famishing person forget his hunger and thirst! You look at them now and feel sick at heart to see the grasses growing waist-high in what was once a garden full of flowers. Here lies a broken column and there an arch.)

Nazeer Akbarabadi has also left behind many such verses which are replete with issues that were adversely affecting society:

> Marey hain hat hat pe sab yahan ke dastkar Aur jitne peshadar hain rotey hain zar zar Kootey hai tan lohar to peetey hai sar sunar Khuch ek do key kam ka rona nahi hai yar Chattees peshey walon ka hai karobar band

(All the craftsmen are sitting idle and all artisans are in tears both the ironsmith and the goldsmith weep inconsolably

it's not a problem affecting one or two the business of thirty six professionals is at a standstill)

Apart from satires, Urdu poetry is replete with poems, occasions, celebrations and festivals like Holi, Diwali and Basant. Breadth of vision and the feeling of national oneness have been the hallmarks of Urdu.

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Even classical poetry has not remained unaffected by political developments.

Mir Taqi Mir cried over the dethronement and blinding

Ahmad Shah thus:

Shahan ko kohle jawhar thi khake pa unki Unhin ki aakhon mein phirti salayan dekhin

(Yes, Monarchs were they Yes, dust under their feet was valued more than the powdered pearls Yes, I have been a witness, their glittering eyes being pierced with needle)

Dil ki barbadi ki es had hai kharabi ke na pooch Jana Jata hai es rah sey lashkar guzra

(Oh how brutally the domain of heart has been devastated it seems it was trampled by a marching army.)

The above two couplets graphically describe the plunder, death a destruction unleashed upon Delhi by Nadir Shah. Another coupled Ghalib is in the background of 1857:

Qado gesu mein qais o kokan ki aazmaaish hai Jehan hum hain wahan daro rasan ki aazmaaish hai

(Qais the lover and Farhad the stone-cutter are competing with one another to excel in stature and style but the arena we are in the contest is for the gallows and the noose)

Many progressive poets like Majrooh and Jafri have also echoed the thoughts expressed by Ghalib who said:

Likhtey rahay junoon ki hikayate khoon chakan Har chand es mein haath hamarey qalam huai

(What if our hands were chopped off nothing could stop us from writing tales of frenzy)

Faiz when faced with imprisonment where there was restriction on the expression, boldly declared:

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Matae lauho qalaam chin gayee to kya gham hai Ki khoon-e dil mein dubolin hain ugliyan maine Zaban pe mohr lagi hai to kya ki rakhdi hai Har ek halqa-e zanjeer maine zaban maine

(If ink and pen are snatched from me shall I Who have dipped my finger in my heart's blood complain—
Or if they seal my tongue, when I have made A mouth of every round link of my chain)

A moot question can be raised that if tradition of poetry has been handed down from generation to generation why should only the Progressive Movement be given the credit of binding literature to society and why should not Hali's natural poetry? To answer this question satisfactorily, the difference between the two movements needs to be understood. One, Hali and Azad through their literary movement sought to create educational and social consciousness and their writing had a sense of purpose and reform, it never included political awakening in its agenda. It did not challenge the rulers while the Progressive Movement opposed British imperialism openly. Its protagonists even suffered incarceration for their daring.

Two, Hali and Azad's movement addressed those among the upper and middle classes which formed the elite. There was nothing in this movement for the ordinary folks, the barber, the baker, the tongawallah, the farmer, peasants and the ordinary labour classes. On the contrary in the Progressive Movement, the problems and issues affecting the poor, backward, downtrodden became subjects to write about.

Three, Hali and Azad's movement did tell the women folk that they were the source of pride to the world but did not tell the world how to treat and respect mothers, sisters and daughters and give them their rights. Respect and pride without any rights is meaningless. The progressives on the other hand took up the issue in right earnest. Way back in 1937, Progressive Writer Majaz had a strong message for the women of the country:

Tere mathe pe yeh aanchal bahut hi khoob hai lekin Tu is aanchal se ek parcham banaleti to accha tha

(The scarf on your forehead is beautiful indeed But it would be better still if you turned it into a flag)

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Another young progressive writer Kaifi addressed the womenfolk thus

Nabze hasti ka lahu kanptey aansu mein nahin Umey khulney mein hai nakhat khame gesu mein

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Jannat ek aur hai jo mard key pehlu main nahin Uski aazad ravish par bhi machalna hai tujhe Uth mere jan mere saath hi chalna hai tujhe

(Life's veins have blood, not trembling tears only in what opens and flies lies frangrance, not in tresses

There is a paradise too, beyond the male's view

To its free rhythm you have to dance in ecstacy Rise my love! You have to walk along with me.)

In Europe and America women's liberation and women's empower ment movements came to the fore in the sixth decade of the last century largely as a result of the writings of two courageous women Germain Greer and Betty Friedman. It's a pity that the world has no knowledge of the fact that 20 years prior to this an Indian woman short-story writer had been fearlessly raising these issues and had been to cour many a time accused of blasphemy and obscenity but the power of he pen showed no relenting. This woman writer was Ismat Chugtai-on of the most formidable pillars of strength of the PWM.

Another striking difference between Hali and Azad's Natura poetry movement and the PWM was that the former was never organized initiative. Having read the Urdu translation of English poetry Hali and Azad advised Urdu poets to write in a simple language about natural scenery and deal with social subjects with reformist zeal. The movement had a very limited following. Apart from Lahore, and a fer poets of Delhi, it did not attract many votaries. The sphere of influence of PWM was not confined to any one language or any one nation. was a universal movement. In India almost all the languages came under its sphere of influence. In Urdu the strength with which this movement became a force to reckon with can be gauged from the fact that all the major centres Delhi, Lucknow, Bombay, Lahore, Hyderab and Aligarh—almost all prominent poets and writers were influence by it.

In the light of these facts, distinction between the Natural Poets Movement and the PWM becomes amply clear.

On November 24th 1934 some young writers and intellectuals and intellectuals and intellectuals are some young writers.

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in a London restaurant to ponder over a document prepared by Sajjad Zaheer, the purpose being to familiarize literature of Indian languages with new subjects and new aesthetics. From among those present some became famous writers in their respective languages. Apart from Sajjad Zaheer, Jyotirmoy Ghosh, Mulk Raj Anand and Mohammad Deer Taseer were in attendance and each one of them earned a name for themselves in their respective languages of Bengali, English and Urdu. It was decided in the meeting that a body called All India Progressive Writers Association be formed and Sajjad Zaheer was asked to give it a practical shape. By mid-1935 the manifesto of the movement was prepared and Sajjad Zaheer came back to India and discussed it with leading litterateurs. Munshi Premchand, the topmost writer in Urdu and Hindi not only praised the manifesto but also published its Hindi translation in his magazine Hans.

The first conference of Progressive Writers Association was held in Lucknow on 13th April 1936 and this manifesto was adopted. This manifesto spelt out the social responsibility of writers in the following words "It is the duty of Indian writers to give full expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and promote scientific and radical outlook and set such critical standards that could adequately combat outdated ideas and beliefs about family, religion, sex, war and society. It is incumbent upon them to check the growth of such ideas and trends, which advocate communalism, racial prejudice and human exploitation."

Munshi Premchand had presided over this conference, and in his presidential address he had said, "literature is not a pastime, it does not deal with love and romance alone but also address problems and issues of life; our body of writers does not want literature to be at the mercy of those who only talk about banal subjects of love and beauty and intoxication. Literature should become the medium to send strong messages across and use it as a tool to initiate action, it is not bothered about language; with the loftiness of the ideal and breadth of vision, language itself strives towards simplicity; the beauty of meaning can be retained without employing ostentatious and verbose expression. The writer who writes for the classes employs a style which is appreciated by the target readers but the ones who write for ordinary folks use a language which is easily comprehended by the masses."

Most of Premchand's address became the salient features of the Progressive Movement; for all time to come this address, while stressing parameters of beauty to be redefined. A progressive writer besides

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appreciating the beauty of his beloved also shows his concern for other aspects of this fast-paced and stressful life and it gives its forceful expression in his works. Premchand's advise finds sublime poetic expression in the following poem of Faiz Ahmed Faiz...

Main ne samjha tha ke too hai to darakshan hai hayat

Tera gham hai to ghame dehar ka jhagra kya hai Teri soorat se hai aalam me baharon ko sabat Teri aankhon ke siwa dunya mein rakh kya hai

(Once I thought:
Life would be all lustre
If you were with me,
The vexing world would not distract
If I made your grief my own
Your beauty lent permanence to spring
What did the whole world hold out for meAll this once I thought)

After talking about the rich attributes of the beloved's beauty, certain other images seize the eye of the poet the dark mysterious spells that countless centuries have cast, the bodies just being traded in the market place, it moved the poet no end and he cries....

Lot jat hai ukhar ko bhi nazar kya kahiye Ab bhi dilkash hai tera husan kya kahiye Aur bhi gam hain zamane mein mohabbat ke siwa Rahatein aur bhi hain wasl ki rat key siwa

(There are many pains other than love and many pleasures are there in the world other than the pleasure of love Dark-brutal spells of countless centuries, Bodies woven into brocade, satin and silk Up for sale in streets and lanes—
Bodies besmeared with dust and bathed in blood—Bodies, as if emerging out Of flaming ovens of disease untold, Puss oozing out of festering wounds—All these sights too catch the eye, how can I ignore? But your beauty remains winsome still, How can I help?

Some detractors of the Progressive Movement considered it 10

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be a movement of certain poets and writers affiliated to the Communist Party. They refused to consider it as a separate movement and dubbed it as a part of the propaganda machinery of the Communist Party—no more no less. To form such an opinion about the PWM a person should either be completely ignorant or untruthful and if fortunately both, then he could hold on to this misconceived notion for the rest of his life.

There is no doubt that Sajjad Zaheer and his other friends who had wanted literature to be concerned with social issues, problems and especially backward and weaker sections were affiliated to the Communist Party. Being a Communist is neither a crime nor a vice but it is also true that there were many others who had no connection with the Communist Party. Premchand himself was ideologically a Gandhian and his presidential address at the first conference is an immensely valuable document which gave firm direction to the aims and objectives, language and style of the Progressive Writers Association. This, movement was also blessed by Rabindranath Tagore, who in a message said that our country was a vast and limitless desert devoid of any sign of life. The country had become a picture of sorrow and suffering and we had to obliterate all those signs of suffering and sorrow in order to rejuvenate and infuse fresh life into it. Tagore thought that writers needed to sing new songs to create awareness and deliver the message of hope and not allow people to become despondent. Writers and artists needed to inform their creations with a love of the country and the people and should refrain from projecting their own selfish agendas. Until and unless people committed themselves to the betterment and uplift of the society, nation and literature, the future of the world would remain bleak. I feel that no one can deny the fact that Tagore was much above petty political parties. Hasrat Mohani, an active Congress leader who underwent rigorous imprisonment was a great supporter of the movement.

Besides Tagore, Premchand and Hasrat Mohani, the Progressive movement found favour with countless writers and intellectuals who were not communists. Pandit Nehru, Maulvi Abdul Haq, Josh, Firaq, Aziz Ahmed, Hayatullah Ansari, Ahmed Nadeem Qasam, the Telegu Poet Sri Sri, Gujarati poet Umashankar Joshi, Punjabi writer Gurbux Singh, Marathi literatteur Anna Bhau Sathe were great votaries of progressive writing though their political ideology was different. Even among the prominent progressive writers of Urdu not all were members of the Communist party. Sardar Jafri, Kaifi, and Jan Nisar Akhtar were card-holders of the Communist Party but many others like

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Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Sahir Ludhianwi, Isma Chughtai were not members of the Communist Party, yet their in volvement with the movement was as deep as any one else's. However it's a fact that in the Progressive Movement there were such people who lacked flexibility in their ideological beliefs. They naturally endean oured to make others fall in line but it did not happen.

In an assembly of Progressives a woman progressive writer during the course of her enthused address said "Our flag is red, our aims and objectives are red, our pen is red, our ink should be red, our shon stories should be red, our ghazals too need to be red." Among the audience was Majaz known for his wit and ready repartee who pleaded with the lady to at least allow the use of pinks. I don't know if the lady condescended or not but in the Progressive Movement along with red there were many lighter and thinner shades of pink as well. The poetry of Niaz Haider, Faiz, Majaz, Kaifi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrool Makhdoom and Sahir does not bear the hallmark of a single uniform colour; each had their own peculiarity and distinctive quality. Similarly the short stories of writers like Krishan Chander, Bedi and Isma Chughtai were not cast in the same mould.

The problem is that if you raise the issue of minorities of women's rights, speak against communalism and religious frenzy of about the economic exploitation of peasants and farmers, and laboured you are immediately dubbed as a Communist though in actual fact you may not be one. I think my Communist friends can take pride in the fact that to be a progressive you needn't be a Communist but?

Communist has to be a Progressive!

It is impossible for a Communist not to be Progressive. Here the question can be asked as to what in reality can be the definition of progressivism. In the light of what Premchand said and what transpire in the many conferences of the PWM addressed by Krishan Chamber and many other eminent writers, it can be said that progressivism not negating tradition altogether. Instead of being enslaved to tradition it insists upon drawing lessons from one's own experiences. To active change can no way be construed as an insult to tradition. Progressivism consists of a radical and scientific approach to the problems of the society, to create such literature, which is useful and purposeful. At and literature should not just give pleasure and enjoyment but the should be a means to inculcate positive values. In the name of abidity by social norms and rituals, women are still subjected to oppressive and injustice. Raising your voice against such issues is to be Progressive to make the problems that plague the socially deprived classes the construction of the problems of the progressive to make the problems that plague the socially deprived classes the problems that plague the social problems that plague t

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subject of literature, to question the ongoing exploitation of labour by the Capitalist is to be Progressive. The question that arises is whether the work of Progressive writers is an indicator of their fulfillment of the writer's social obligations. Progressive short story writers have played an important role in disseminating progressive values. Besides Premchand's path-breaking stories there are innumerable stories like Ali Abbas Husaini's "Mela Ghoomni", Krishan Chander's "Kalu Bhangi" and "Zindagi Ke Mor Par", Ismat Chughtai's, "Genda", "Chauthi ka Jora" and "Nannhi Ki Naani", Bedi's "Lajwanti", "Apne Dukh Mujhe Dedo", Hayatullah Ansari's, "Aakhri Koshish", Ghulam Abbas's "Anandi", Balwant Singh's "Jagga", Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi's "Gandasa", Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's "Ababee" and "Tiddi", Upendra Nath Ashk's "Kakran Ka Teli" which have fulfilled the requirements of social responsibilities asked for by Premchand and the advice proferred by Gurudev Tagore in his message to the 1936 Coference of the PWA.

The list is endless but in the interest of brevity only a few have been mentioned. These short stories are an index of the manner in which the writers have met their social responsibilities as enumerated by Premchand in his famous address of 1936, and endorsed by Tagore in his message to the conference. Perhaps taking his cue from the two stalwarts, Krishan Chander said in a session of the PWA:

Its seems that our stories and poems barring a few have not come down from the high pedestal. Poetry in particular has not yet outgrown feudal underpinnings. It continues to be in tune with the subdued and melancholic temper of old. It is not firmly rooted in the soil, nor does it exude the sweat of the peasant's toil. I do not find in poetry or other literary genres, the home and hearth of the poor nor the songs of the peasant, nor the workers, endless travails. Our poetry does not refer to the working woman's broken comb with wisps of hair entangled in it; nor does it refer to Dabbo Manohar's pet that accompanies him every morning when he sets out to plough the fields; it does not reverberate with the sprightly and bold love songs which the rural women humn for their menfolk while carrying food for them across the uneven pathways. It does not allude to their clothes that smell of dung. Our literature has no reference to bathwa—it does not need to dwell upon the whiff of perfume emitted by the musk-deer nor the locks and tresses of Tataari beauties, and that is its major lacuna. I do not find the humble abodes of my country, its flora and fauna, nor a familiar image that would enchant one even after a 100 years! Till such time that we do not come down to earth, and study the life lived by peasants and workers in their homes and paint its true picture with utmost sincerity and effort, till then our literature will not attain literary heights that will compel a reader in the world to conclude that Indians are the same as them. Though the task is difficult we have to accomplish it.

Krishan Chander alone could have said such things. I am convinced that there are innumerable people in India who have deeply felt the anguish of class struggle, social exploitation and inequality not from political leader's statement or economist's discourse or a sociologist's thesis, but as an effect of those progressive short stories that have shaped the readers' social consciousness.

A large number of novels and short stories written by Manto. Krishan Chander, Ramanand Saagar and many other Progressive Writers in the aftermath of the Partition of India and the riots that followed still take the imagination by storm. Ghaddar by Krishan Chander deserves special mention here. The central character Dina Nath belongs to a feudal Hindu household in a village near Lahore. His haveli is burnt down and all family members are put to death. However he manages to survive and flees to Amritsar witnessing the acts of savagery and bloodshed. The scene remains the same even there-humanity is under fire. Haunted by barbarism, death and destruction, Dina Nath ponders over the hollowness of the pride that man takes in civilization, which is like a veil torn apart by a freak event in history, laying bare the primeval forests of human instincts. Towards the end of the novel, Dina Nath stands alone in a field where a group of Muslims was massacred earlier in the day. Corpses lie all over the place. Dina Nath hears the cry of a child and detatches it from its dead mother. He embraces the child and says to himself "Dina Nath, you are not following the logic of mutual hatred between the two nations. Where do you go from here?"

Now I would like to acquaint you with the views of the opponents of Progressive Literature. Those of us who know a little about these opponents must have heard the name of Gopal Mittal who was the arch enemy of the Progressive Movement. In the silver jubilee issue of his journal, *Tahreek*, Anwar Sadeed of Pakistan has this to say about the progressive short story writers "These writers lost sight of their

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literary obligations and out of political compulsions exploited the tragedy of Partition as padding material before it could become part of the human consciousness. To enhance the effect of the story, events that had not taken place were super-imposed into the storylines. I wish I could ask Anwar Sadeed whether after the barbarism of 1947 there was any need for exaggeration to create effect. Anwar Sadeed further says that Progressive Writers used the theme of riots consciously to highlight their objectivity but their hypocrisy and partisanship could not remain concealed.

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It is easier to see Anwar Sadeed's comments and I don't need to delve deeper into it. In a famous story by Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi entitled "Parmeshwar Singh", a childless Sikh chances upon a Muslim child of seven or eight years during the riots. He thinks of bringing him up as a Sikh but he is jolted by his conscience and feels compelled to restore the child to its family near the border. The child crosses the border but the border Police kills Parmeshwar Singh. Reacting to this story Anwar Sadeed comments "Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi in "Parmeshwar Singh" has tried to create the effect of objectivity but has only succeeded in falsifying true human emotions, which means that in other words, had Parmeshwar Singh killed the child or successfully changed his religion, that would have appeared natural to Anwar Sadeed. And if Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi would have Parmeshwar Singh restored the child to its parents, it would appear unbelievable to Anwar Sadeed because it was contrary to human nature. Thus it seems Anwar Sadeed has a poor opinion not only of Progressive Movement but also of human beings at large. I find it difficult to explain but I'll ask my brother Dr. Salman Akhtar who is a psychologist, to do that for me!

The Progressive Movement has given poets of such eminent stature to Urdu that remains unequalled in the annals of literary history. The history of Urdu poetry would be considered incomplete without poets like Faiz, Majaz, Jafri, Majrooh, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Makhdoom, Sahir and a host of others.

From 1935 to 1975 poetry has given effective expression to a range of social experiences, longings, desires, dissent and aspirations to successive generations. This poetry is not of luxury and indulgences. It is about the common man—peasants, factory workers whose hands are smeared with mud on their hands and sweat on their brows. This poetry is a declaration of war against upper class exploiters. It is about the fast receding night and the impending dawn.

Progressive poets are generally accused of dealing with exclusive themes of an agitational nature. Sometimes political discourses have

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been versified to pass as poetry. Sometimes propaganda and slogan mongering have been taken recourse to thereby stifling literary and aesthetic considerations.

I'll speak the truth and nothing but the truth. It is not that all the accusations are entirely baseless. At the same time they are not wholly true. There is no doubt that barring a few, most Progressive poets can be faulted one way or the other. At the same time it can be asserted that most Progressive writers have produced works that have become a valuable part and legacy of Urdu literature. Poetry, good and bad, is a commonplace in all eras but a poet is remembered for his contribution of a lasting value—the weaker parts of his works are either ignored or forgotten or forgiven. If Mir could say:

Door baitha Ghbar-e Mir us se Ishq bin yeh adab nahin aata

(Even my dust settled at a distance from her repect can only be borne out of intense love)

The same great poet also composed the following couplet;

Suna jaata hai ai ghatiye tere majlis nashinon se ki tu daru piye raat ko milkar kaminon se

(It is being said by the people whose company you keep
That you go about drinking at night with
undesirable ruffians)

But we adore Mir for such couplets as:

Chashme khoon basta se kal raat lahoo phir tapka Hum to samjhe the ki ai mir yeh azaar gaya

(Last night my blood-soaked eyes oozed drops of blood yet again Oh! The delusion Mir that I forever was rid of this malaise!)

Will we judge Ghalib's greatness from the following couplet:

Partaw-e khor se hai shabnam ko fana ki taleem Ham bhi hain ek inayat ki nazar hone tak

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(A mere glance of favour cast over my hapless self Might have been what the fatal rays of the sun teach the dew drops unseen)

Or from the couplets written in lighter and jocular vein like

Dhaul dhappa us sarapa naaz ka shewa nahin Hum hi kar baithe the Ghalib peshdasti ek din

(She was not accustomed to fight and fisticuffs It was me Ghalib who started it all)

Majrooh is accused of composing non-poetic verses like:

Amn ka jhanda is dharti par kisne kaha lahrane na paye Yeh bhi koi Hitler ka hai chela marle saathi jane na paye

(Who stopped the flag of peace being raised on earth
He seems to be follower of Hitler get him before he escapes)

Look at the profundity and sublimity of Majrooh's poetic qualities in the following couplet:

Dekh zindan se pare rang-e chaman josh-bahar Raqs karna hai to paon ki zanjeer na dekh

(Look beyond the prison walls what flowers have bloomed look at the exuberance and fervour of spring If you want to dance don't pay heed to shackles that bind your feet)

Or

Rok sakta hamen zindan-bala kya Majrooh Hum to awaz hain deewar se chan jate hain

(Majrooh how could I be imprisoned in a looney citadel My cries filter through the stony walls)

Sardar Jafri who is often accused of just praising and eulogizing

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Russia and Stalin, has also given very memorable poems to Und

Safed ata siyah chakki se raag bankar nikal raha hai Sunehri chulhon mei aag ke phool khil rahe hain Patiliyan gunguna rahi hain Dhuen se kale tawe bhi chingariyon ke honton se hans rahe hain

Dupatte aangan mein doriyon par tange hue hain Aur unke aanchal se dhaani Sunehri pagdandiyon ke dil par Siyah lahengon ki srkh gotein machal rahi hain yeh saadgi kis qadar hasin hai

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(White flour pours forth like a melody from hand-driven mills.
Flowers of fire spring into bloom
From golden hearths
Pots are singing.
Hot plates charred with smoke
Are laughing with cinder-black lips
Scarves are hanging
On clothes-lines in the courtyard,
And they are dripping dhani drops.
Red hems of black skirts
Are dancing on the heart
Of golden bypaths.
How beautiful is this simplicity!

One can apply the strictest norms of aesthetic standards and can but be enchanted by the following stanzas composed by Sardar.

Pattiyon ki palkon par Os jagmagati hai Imliyon key peron par Dhoop par sukhati hai Muskuratey hain tarey Chand key katorey sey Chandni chirakti hai Jail ki fizaaon mein Phir bhi ek andhera hai Jesey ret mein gir kar Doodh jash ho jai Roshni key gallon par Tirgi key nakhoon ki Sekron kharashen hain

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(Dewdrops shine
On the eyelashes of leaves.
Sunlight dries its feathers
On tamarind trees
The sun laughs
Stars smile
Moonlight spills from
The cup of the moon.
The compound of the prison
Is still bathed in darkness;
As if milk is absorbed
In a vast expanse of sand.
Nails of darkness
Have left countless scratches
On the cheeks of the light.

Every Progressive writer has contributed some poems and some pieces of verse that have made Urdu literature proud. 'Ham Jo Tareek Rahon Mein Mare gaye', 'Zindan Ki ek Subh', 'Tanhai' by Faiz; 'Chand Taron Ka Ban' and 'Andhera' by Makhdoomi 'Taj Mahal' and 'Parchaiyan' by Sahir; 'Mera Safa' and 'Pathar ki Dewaar' by Jafri; 'Khak-e-dil' and Aakhri Mulaqaat' by Jan Nisar Akhtar, 'Meena Bazaar' and 'Zameen' by Wamiq; 'Ibn-e-Maryam' and 'Aurat' by Kaifi; 'Maut' by Jazbi and several pieces by him and Majrooh which have become aphorisms and proverbs in Urdu. The words of all these poets bear a stamp of their love of human beings, their faith in the destiny of man, and the greatness of human life. I am reminded of a few couplets of Jan Nisar Akhtar which celebrate the beauty and greatness of life thus:-

Jeeney ki har tarah sey tamanna hasin hai Har shar key bawajood yeh duniya hasin hai Dariya ki tund barh bhayanak sahi magar Toofan sey khelta hua tinka hasin hai Sehra ka har sukoot darata rahay to kiya Jangal ko kat-ta hua rasta hasin hai Dil ko hilaye lakh Ghataon ki ghan garaj Mitti pey jo gira wohi qatra hasin hai Raton ki teergi hai jo purhaul gham nahin Subhon ka jhankta hoa chehra hasin hai Lakhon saubaton ka agar samna bhi ho Har jehad har amal ka taqaza hasin hai

(The desire to remain alive is beautiful Despite all evil this world is beautiful

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nd can as Sardar. The awful flow of the river may be terrifying But the lonely straw battling with the storm is beautifu

The silence of the desert may be intimidating
But the path which cuts across the wild is beautiful
The sound and fury of dark skies may cause
commotion in the heart

But the tiny drop that falls down is beautiful. Never mind if the darkness of the night is fearsome The face of the dawn peeping through it is beautiful. Even if scores of challenges stare in the face The will to toil and labour is beautiful.

Though the shade, temper and diction of all progressive poets is distinct, they have all dedicated their works to the common cause which Faiz has so masterfully deliniated in the following poem.

Dedicated to the present And the sorrow of present times which is alienated from the Rose-garden of life, The forest of yellow autumnal leaves That is my country-The assembly of griefs. Dedicated to the benumbed souls of officemen the moth-eaten hearts and tongues, To the postmen, the tonga drivers, the railway engine drivers, the hungry brave men of factories, The master of the World, the King of the beyond, deputy of God on earth-The peasant; Whose cattle have been driven away by the rogues Whose daughters has been abducted by the dacoits, Whose field, not even of arm's lengtha part of which has been taken away by the Patwari, Another part by the revenue officer, whose turban, under the feet of the oppressor, is in shreds To the grief stricken motherswhose children cry in nights sleepless, refuse to be consoled, do not tell their grief.

To those dames whose flowers of eyes

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blossom in vain behind screens and corridors only to be withered away.

To those married women whose limbs got exhausted at loveless decorative nuptial beds.

To the widows lanes, by lanes and pockets where in the profane places the moon is often seen performing ablution.

Where under the shadows—
one may hear sighs
the henna of hem
the sound of bangles
the fragrance of locks of hair
the burning smell of the aspirations—
suppressed in the hearts.

To the seekers of knowledge those who reached the gates of powers that be with offers of the pen and the book and did not return to their homes;

To those innocent souls who, in their naivete, with lamps lit in their hand, aspiring for high ideals, landed up where there was darkness, endless,

To the prisoners whose hearts lit with night-burnt fire of tomorrow's dreams, turned into stars.

To the brightness of future days which like fragrance of roses has been lost in its own world.

All these poets are no more. But the manifesto of their creed was expressed by Sahir in no uncertain terms thus:

We neither shied away nor bowed our heads down,

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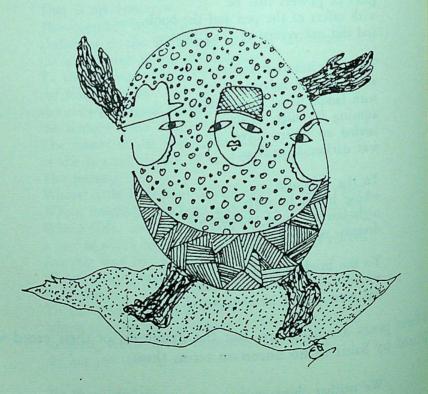
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We confronted the oppressor by looking through into his eyes.
Why regret if we lived one night less,
As long as we lived, we lived as torch-bearers.

Majaz summed up the achievement of Progressive literature in the following quatrain.

Human intellect, in the darkness of superstitions, the hard, stormy dark night, if nothing else, has at least dreamt of a dawn. where none had looked hitherto, has looked up to that morning.

Translated from Urdu by Humayun Zafar Zaidi



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Appropriating the 'Other': Some Challenges of Translation and its Theories

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"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was translation, and with it God translated the human and the earth. But the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Word moved upon the face of the waters, translating the light from the darkness."

Pierre Grange

The Theory of Translation or Translational Theory is a serious reflection on the changing configuration of the socio-cultural scene, in a climate charged with unusual dynamism and vitality. Translation as such, has come a long way from 'carry over' of meaning in a linguistic activity to the present position of an 'intellectual activity' which is almost identical with the transposition of culture, where transformation is a rule, not fixity. Developing from the linguistic approach of the 1960's, through the textual focus of the 70's to the culturally based approach of the 80's, modern translation theory like modern critical theory takes on different intertextual, polysystematic hermeneutics. Coming from Eugene Neda, James Holmes, Noam Chomsky, Antony Popovic, Jaques Derrida, Gideon Tory, Jose Lambat and Edwin Gentzler, the last four decades have been dominated by Theory, which interestingly, has come down from its rarefied field of knowledge of high academic pedestal to traffic with the cultural scenario, taking into account highbrow and lowbrow with equal ease. Filiated to dialogic dimension now, it constantly teases the relationship between two literary erary-cultural texts.

My purpose in this article is primarily to trace the transaction theories with regard to postmodern times. Obviously the Postcolon context would play an important role in the basic assumptions Translation as a theory in the wider and ever-expanding panorama interpretation. I am going to bypass however, the fields of literan semiotic translation, their rules and codes, in short philological aspect of Translation, in determining inexplicit or unsaid meanings embedden in different parameters of surrounding problematics. My aim is to draw attention to some analogous relationships between hermeneutical co structions and translatory 'experiences', which according to Husse would be classified as the non-verbal aspects of the speaker's intention literature and culture, and their translational bonding within different cultural givens-not simply intellectual but congnitive, emotive, planting, p netic, anthropologic. My problem will be to show how translation at translational theory transverse the territories of nation, person, culture in more ways than one in the modern context to reach and enrichted global cultural perspective. In this continuous negotiation betwee theory with narrative, and narrative with culture, in the transactive mutually dependant nature of the 'inside' and 'outside', questions these will arise. Does celebrating 'the other' actually reaffirm a structure of centre margin? What does 'we' mean? And who are 'they' 'b other'?

Translation goes beyond the principles of semiotic structure! understand the intricate mechanism of a cultural system organize around some peripherally different constellation of Signifier and Sq nified which form literary text. What initially was the language! language translation turns out in close reading a complete network interrelationships. As Bakhtin believed, the system of language is herently dialogic. Language and words made sense only in its one tation of intercommunication directed towards an 'Other'. Highligh ing the material nature of language, Bakhtin pointed out that languages are embedded in social, economic, political and ideologic systems. Thus the dialogical voice includes the 'Other's' voice in its and, translation locates this translinguistic voice in its approximate to achieve the layers of meanings of a given text in another language trope, spirit. Translation, in fact opens up a text to other realmy understanding by re-reading and re-creating by its radical suggestions and re-creating by its radical suggestions. that all reading is, in fact, deconstructive. The more a text is translated or read or interest in the state of the state or, read, or, interpreted, the greater is its unreadability. The reads translator finally confronts the moment of aporia when all traces the text's materiality get dissolved. The practical task of the translation starts in aporia,

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starts in that unreadability. He reads between the lines to inhabit the aporia, or, the inbetweenness—to discover a new meaning.

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As liminality or betweenness becomes characterstic of postmodern experience, translation and its theories validate the potential of the hidden flow presented in a literary text to allow a turn to the text into another territory, to other cultures to maximize symbolic profit. As Greenblatt puts it, (Greenblatt 1989 13), "contemporary theory must situate itself...not outside interpretation but in the hidden places of negotiation and exchange". A case in point is the translation of our great epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata at different ages by different translators at different places of India, and also in Indonesia, Thailand, Malyasia, to name a few foreign lands. In each case some legend or story has been overturned on its head, some new relationship recovered or discovered, some new dimensions added. Derrida constructs the same theory in Deconstruction and Criticism, (Derrida 1979: 84), that a text is decidedly not a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces, referring endlessly to something other than itself.... Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far...all the limits, everything that was set up in opposition to writing-speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference, to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics and so forth."2 So, translation aims at reaching that 'other', contesting it with its own set of referent traces, examining cultural sedimentations when they come across, and, thus, transforming itself as a powerful tool for analysis of entrenched ideologies and attitudes.

A culture is known to be in a perpetual process of transformation—so is translation, as it moves on as an eternal wayfarer in search of a perfect habitation, in a system of contiguous cultural relationship of the self with the 'other'. Negating the reductive process of minimizing the text into mere language games of rhetorical analysis and holistic essentialism of one way traffic between source language and target language, translation in Postcolonial writings defines itself as an assertion of national self-identity foregrounding the Other to be examined and contested within given frameworks.

Another very interesting aspect of the Postcolonial translational activities is in the form of the third world intellectuals like Said, Spivak, Yasmin Goonaratne, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and many more, and their characteristic writings, that constantly negotiate between the two worlds: worlds of their birth and origin, and The World of their

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work. They constantly translate themselves, continuing the process of their intellectual interrogation through their creative constructs, thus appropriating the Other with all its relative tropes. Within the Postcolonial enterprise, they are critically introspective about their conditions (self), in order to confront the challenge of the other culture. Integration of the alien and the migrant, the self and the other is essentially a problem of language and translation, because the notion of integration is built upon the supposition that, the narratives and symbols of a particular culture can be translated into another, to make out finally a 'unitary sign' of human culture.

New theories of historiography, anthropology, and ethnography have been extremely influential in the notion of 'text' and 'translated representation'. In this way, the metaphorical creation of new world and concepts leads to the possibilities of the creation of new world alternative actualities. Thus translational activity is a constant need of this time of constant amalgamation of moving cultures—so that there is never a final resting place for thought/truth. The certainist discours of 'living' in one place in continuous exploration of the 'Self is a challenge to the persistent heterogeneity of Postcolonial cultures, that invests itself in a complexity of form full of 'difference' and contradictions. In a way though this tension is necessary to transcend the monolithic acculturation to the realm of plurality and multiplicity.

Translation lives between two texts. The fundamental issue is the encounter of two languages, two cultures, two paradigms of the mind also the deflected play of all that lies between and beyond Rubiyald Omar Khayyam is a case in point. We have its Bengali, Hindi and English translations; and in each translatory narrative, the translatory is drawing out possibilities with the continually shifting interplayd mutual appropriation. As a result, the translation reveals in the original the potential to be something 'other' than itself. As Derrida's theory of "Difference" (Margin of Philosophy 1982) and "notion of motion" suggest, the play of trace can never be pinpointed which carries ide tifiable meaning across boundaries to a movement along an unmappe alley. As one tries to stop its movement to grasp it, it disseminates crossing over to 'other' places, 'other' differences. The translator to juggle through all issues of resistances. Let us look at Marvell's ling. in "To His Coy Mistress": "Had we but World enough and time. that had been translated by Eliot in "Prufrock..." in an ironic, ernistic and reductive way of expressing or making love, or, making love, to be precise. Here is how Robert Penn Warren' true lational structure as well: (Warren 1966: 34) "Can we make

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generalization about the nature of the poetic structure? First it involves resistances, at various levels. There is the tension...between the particular and the general, the concrete and the absurd, between the elements of even the simplest metaphor...between ideas...between the elements involved in irony, between prosaisms and poeticisms."

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Since the work of art is grounded in the socio-political and economic contexts, one cannot read it without understanding how these contexts have shaped the choice of genre/theme/structure of the author's work. So the ironic representation by Eliot of the social-emotional context of Marvell's text in modern-day context throws open the translational revelations to readers' "horizon of expectation," a whole gamut of new experiences. Translation proves that text can transcend any set of literary or critical conventions and readers with widely different backgrounds may fill in those blanks and gaps with new, unconventional meanings. As the horizon of expectations differ in different ages, so Pope's poetry, metaphysical poetry or even Shakespeare get different appreciations in different eras of diverse sociocultural, political-ethical backgrounds.

Translation theory and literary theory come together in the act common to them both: reading. Reading is itself an act of interpretation, which in turn is itself an act of translation. Harold Bloom, George Steiner, Frederick Jameson are all of the view that reading and translation are intermingled activities. While reading is a form of translation, conversely, translation is essentially a form of intense reading. Paul Valery considers translator as an original artist working in a process a miniature artist does within severe limits. Similarly the playwright and director, choreographer and dancer, composer and singer are all in the dual role of appropriating the binary of 'self' and 'other' exploring distinctive ways of interpretation. In fact the original title of 'writer' and 'translator is interchangeable; in the deeper sense of their resonance they are one. So the New Testament of the Bible most of which was translated from lost sources, is presented as original Gospels not translation

Noah and his flood in The Old Testament purport to be unique rather than a late re-incarnation of two millennia of Mesopotamian flood stories. Though some might call them adaptations, we know that Poetic dramas of Shakespeare are with few exceptions, translations. Antony and Cleopatra is a translation of translation, for Shakespeare does account for Desically?

J. Hills Miller employed a perfect trope to describe translation

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(Miller, 1988) that it is a "wandering existence in perpetual exile." Certainly it cannot and does not return.

Postcolonial literature's major concern with place and displace ment, crises of identity, an effective identifying relationship between 'self' and 'other', are all actualized in translation. The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available, to describe it, forms a crucial Postcolonial problematic plane where the translator resides.

Plurality of languages and interpretations is another resourceful field for translation to work in. In the course, gray areas between languages appear as a continuous chain of signification in a constant state of interplay, mutually supplementing each other, mutually finding ways to appropriate the endless possibilities of text. The traces that are covered up as we speak can be explored by translation theory over the "threshold" of understanding, as it is equipped to follow the play of all the problems, divergences and differences. Thus over a variety of systematic borders, translation takes place. So, Lambert and Robyns view the discipline more as intracultural activity, less as an interlinguistic process. Umberto Eco also views translation as identical to culture, at through endless translations of signs into other signs, across time and space, a process evolves during which these signs are re-contextualised according to different cultural code.

These theories doubtless broaden the perspective of translation pushing it to the centre of activities exploding the distinctive concept of national literature, breaking down also in the process, the distinction between written and other discursive practices—opening up endless possibilities. This is what Lefevre suggests as its broadening horizon (Lefevre 1987:19) "By collecting canonised, non-canonised, and extra literary texts, published within a given society itself, by establishing repertoire of cultural phenomena, scholars can make connections as well as see patterns that could be informative to deal with falsifiable cultural data, and the way they affect people's lives....Interpretations can be made use of to unravel the network of social, political and economic factors which regulate both the productions and the receptions of literature."

Translation's movement is always from self to other, and when self gets absorbed into appropriating the otherness in order to absorbe it in new language, a new birth happens. In the words of Ashcroft Griffith-Tiffin, (1981:15) "... invisibly or glaringly, by silent stealth of noisy confusion, that new art object, that double-headed hybrid of spring of uncertain parentage, is born and presented to the world by

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means of the translator's double art." When the indigenousness gets oppressed by cultural subversion, or, the valid sense of "Self" gets eroded by cultural denigration, or displacement, a deep concern with the myths of identity become common in the Postcolonial sensibility of the Imperialist-Native binary. Translation is of great help to these alienated people floundering within the gaps of incomprehensive displacement. The gap which opens between the experience of the place and the language available to describe it, forms an all-pervasive feature of Postcolonial text.

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Now, this gap is very significant for those, whose language rendered unprivileged by oppressive colonial language seems inadequate to describe a new place/new logo of existence. Unless the colonial language, or the language of the 'other' gets appropriated by a translation of sorts, a condition of alienation is bound to take place. This exactly is why Chinua Achebe felt the urge to 'transform' the language, making it 'bear the burden of their living experience.' Such alienation is shared by those whose possession of English alienates him from his native tongue, as well as those whose language codes are felt to be inadequate to translate the cultural practices and codes. R. Parthasarathy, the diaspora poet of Indian origin translates vividly the pains of incommunicability when he decides to write in Tamil.

My tongue in English chain
I return after a generation to you
I am at the end
Of my Dravidic tether
Hunger for you unassuaged
I falter. Stumble.

'Translated men' too needs to come back home to allow them to express their sense of 'otherness'.

Values that build the concept of multiculturalism around the world, are the same that encourage tolerance, generous multiple views, and an evolving tradition of responses to changes in the making of the global citizenry. The potential of translation can be fully realized once we are able to approach literary text as agents as well as participants in a cultural conversation re-presenting the inconclusive parameter of understanding that would make significant strides towards a new domain of culture studies. So better human relations will result from readers with widely differing views sharing and comparing their responses through strategies of Interpretation and Reading. The main reason for studying texts through appropriating many 'othernesses' is to expand

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the mind by introducing it to the immense possibilities in human actions and thoughts, to see and feel what other people have expensenced, to know what they have known in their own ways. To be sure the process of translation is everywhere. It is an essential activity of life itself. It endlessly extends and thus endlessly defers the implication of the original. The movement of the signification adds something which results in the fact that there is always more.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ramakanta Rath: Poems; J.P.Das: Poems; (English translations by the poets), Indian Writers Series, Grassroots, Bhubaneswar, Calcutta, Price: Rs.195 each.

It is interesting that Ramakanta Rath: Poems, the second collection of Ramakanta Rath's poems in English rendering, courtesy the Indian Writers Series, Grassroots, had to forerun the bestowal of Padma Bhusan on this great poet from Orissa. While a Padma title blends well with the creative potential and charisma of Rath and his respectable album of awards, the enigma remains that only a second publication of this senior poet should be available in English translation for the readers who are not familiar with his Oriya originals.

Poems carries thirty-eight poems, selected and translated from the entire range of the poet. So this should be an ideal possession for non-Oriya speakers interested in Rath's poetry, and a review of this collection demands a scan of his complete collections in Oriya.

Rath remains the most popular Oriya poet in the second half of the last century, with the largest fan-following. He has been followed the most, though his restrained linguistic and aesthetic sub-world of a laboratory control situation would not allow a decent replication of his style. And as an artist he has been discussed the most too.

With nine volumes of poetry, Rath became a familiar name in the Indian language literary circuits with SriRadha—his much-celebrated epical long poem on the experiences of a soul deeply in love. In sixty-one numbers, one of its poems begins:

A friend enquired why I love you so recklessly. What could I tell her? I only looked at the constellation above. And then, for some unknown reason, a chill spread through my bones, ...I thought there would be a night at the end of several nights when the sky as usual would be filled with stars

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eure Studio Writes Back but I would have disappeared. How could I explain this and this alone was the cause of my reckless love?

(This poem and nine others from SriRadha have been placed in this

collection here) SriRadha, interestingly, eclipsed many of the powerful poems of Rath, known for their singular inimitable nuances. To take a case, one of his earlier poems Mastranee (The School Mistress) was lost among the readers after the publication of SriRadha. The poem begins: Two and two make four/ Why should such a simple truth/ in order to be established/ Consume my entire youth? Mastranee is a very powerful poem, in fact as powerful as SriRadha, and in retrospect, can be appreciated as a forerunner to the latter in terms of angst. Rath quickly clarifies, and probably we get a glimpse to the processes and product of his creativity in his clarification; "A poet, naturally, is sad when poems that once fulfilled him go into oblivion. He is aware that one day almost everything he wrote will be far, far away from readers. This is his destiny—a destiny many greater poets have suffered... I had not consciously planned this poem as a forerunner of SriRadha. In both the poems, a woman is the protagonist. Women protagonists do not die, they live on, renew for ever their love, their despair and their

defiance of fate." (Rath's interview with me, 24.2.06)

Do we need a louder communiqué on Rath's creative contents. The ephemeral quality of life is a steady subtext of the poet's thematic catalogue; entwined to it is the realization of helplessness of being a poet. Neo-feminism is yet another...

Rath's poetic career. He has written all his difficult works during the first two decades of his career, preceding SriRadha. In fact, in the after word to his first collection Kete Dinara (Of Long-past Times) in 1962, Rath is apprehensive about the reception his work might generate, even whether the collection would ring the death-knell to his poet's career. Kete... carried some very powerful poetry and an equal measure of creative potential, dealing with the intellectual fix of the conscious and sensitive man arising out of the dual contingencies of meaninglessness and inevitability of life and its various processes including death. These concerns ran through the subsequent collections before SriRadha.

SriRadha escaped the label of being obscure. Perhaps the subject of the text is too beloved to the Indian reader to have helped skip the elements of abstraction of the poet's earlier poetry. Though in the

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interview quoted above, Rath does not entertain the trappings of the Radha-Krishna myth into his work, I have my own reservations if the book would have acquired its household status if titled otherwise. In any case, the treatment of an emotion that is essentially feminine perhaps helped in the mellowing of the poet's style. In a way, modern Oriya poetry, of which Rath remains the best ambassador, came a full circle with *SriRadha* with its lyrical quality and the musicality of its verses.

SriRadha is followed, in both form and spirit, by three other collections: SriPalaataka, (Mr Escapist), 1999; Seemantabasa (Frontierdwelling), 2002, and Pheri Chanhile (In Retrospect), 2004. The theme, idiom, tenor, metre, concern, length, structure, for the poet, have morphed over the years. From earlier complex abstractions, Rath has evolved to a transparent and almost communicative poetry. The arrogant poetic-self has been replaced by a marginalized-self (Seemantabasa). And the poems even do not concern particularly the social problems, as there is the nagging realization of inadequacy because of the status of a poet (Pheri Chanhile)—the awful realization that a poet cannot make a perceptible change to come over the tragic times he inhabits. All the same his poetry 'does incorporate the poet's living world into its fold', contrary to the cavalier contentions of the critics, and let me locate a defence to summarily write off one such censure:

I offer this water to you, my father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and to you, soldiers and generals who fought for us and who fought against us and who were killed by this war. I stand here, on this battlefield, and give this water and rice to you – you must be hungry and thirsty... Ask for nothing other than this water and rice... Whatever I have other than this water and this rice are surely not appropriate offerings for departed souls ("A Request to the Dead")

I consider Mastranee to be another masterpiece betraying the angst of a poet aware of the social realities, which is new-historicist in approach and not a poem of 'escape'.

The publication here is the second book of the poet in a regular English translation form. I have a feeling that Rath would have done

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equally well and probably been more famous (remember Rushdie's not long-ago summary dismissal of Indian language writings?) had he written his poetry in English. But then, only very few writers take a decision quietly.

It is a different story with J.P. Das. A major bulk of his literature; available in English rendering, and amazingly so, considering that Das is both prolific and a writer of fiction, play, creative history and an history besides poetry (Das also contributes to children's literature). This collection should adequately solace the critics cribbing about Oriya poets sidelining social and political issues. The collection carries forty-one poems and I leave out the odd, largely comical nonsens verses at the end of the collection, though they bring in the much required comic relief to the otherwise tense environ of most of the pieces, and though Das nurtures an equal degree of seriousness translating them. In fact, in a self-appraisal write up – Meet the Author Indian Literature, vol. 217, Sept-Oct-2003 – Das has made some interesting linguistic points, relevant to the subject of translation, regarding their translation.

Poems is overstuffed with pieces where unambiguously expressed statements on ailments of our times—hunger, violence, the ever-expanding web of neo-colonialism cartwheel through the 100-odd pages "Pokhran", "Gandhi", "Gujarat"; "Kalahandi", "Savage"... trail the tragic realisation that there is no escape from the wretchedness that stalks the earth, and this wretchedness is largely a man-made contingency. Ever the not-so-direct numbers such as "Mask", "Historical Truth", "Mahabharat", "Kalinga" reveal the discontent of the poetic-self visit visit the inevitable ironies of history and civilisation.

This discontent converts to an aggression at its threshold in "The Daffodil," the meta-poem on unrequited Anglophilia of the post Independence, English-educated Indian, resulting in a lifetime's debit

tation and condemnation to neo-colonialism:

Neither the teacher in the classroom nor his confounded pupil, nor the westward-looking scholar has seen it with his mortal eyes; yet the daffodil, fluttering and dancing in the breeze

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d in "The the poste's debiliin its golden arrogance, flashes upon their inward eye... The daffodil shines as ever before in its shameless arrogance in the inward eyes of our very own intellectuals.

(when I quoted this poem at an international seminar at Kurukshetra university on the occasion of the World Poetry Day recently, an American poet told me: 'It's time, Indians spoke like this...'!)

In all honesty, the poems do betray some degree of triteness; the understatements and self-depreciation Das has been known for, are taken over by unswerving expressions of resentment of the poetic-self. Perhaps this is Das's answer to the defencelessness of the poet that Rath feels about, though Das's dialectic on the subject is not very different from the latter's. In the same article that I have referred to, Das clarifies his position: "What can or should a poet do in a situation like Kalahandi, or the more immediate situation that confronts us in Gujarat? Can the poet take an activist's role...? It is enough for the poet to be the guilty conscience of his times. There is, however, a lot of expectation from poetry, which to my mind, is rather misplaced."

The straightness of Das's idiom too foregrounds their façade of statement-carriers, like the opening lines of Kalahandi (Put away the road maps now./ to go there,/ you do not need helicopters anymore;/ wherever there is hunger,/ there Kalahandi is.) that sets the tone for the prevailing mood of despair and antipathy in the poem. Though it is equally true that this idiom in English rendering magnify in dignity and lends the poems an unequivocal Western-ness. Look at these lines – heavily-personalised in the original that passes through a process of mystification and de-personalisation as the linguistic medium changes:

You are surrounded by relatives and friend, leaning on the fullness of the time gone by,You put down the half-read book; you silence the words seeking shelter on your lips; you arrange your anxieties in the stray tresses falling on your forehead... ("This Moment").

Yet there are no old storylines here; the truism never strips the poems of their creative brightness. The poet builds up his aesthetic

Lipipuspa Nayak / 175

distance carefully; the poetic persona is diffident yet immensely nified in its recourse in imaginative liberties: When Babri rises again poetry will affirm/ that temples are built... / like poetry,/ with inappoetry will affirm/ that temples are built... / like poetry,/ with inappoetry will affirm/ that temples are built... / like poetry,/ with inappoetry will affirm with inappoetry with i nation and faith/ in the hearts of men. ("After Gujarat"). Elsewher "Fear", the poem that the poet labels as his "response to Emergence" the only national trauma in modern times for one from Orissi elegantly transcends the level of the personal to a universal declaration on this primordial emotion through a series of brilliant multi-senson images:

> Fear is the offspring of King Kong who emerges from childhood fables... fear is the thumping in unison of heavy boots in times of curfew in the lands of impotent men...

"Fear" has the potential to disturb any complacency.

There appears to be a sequence, howsoever vague, in the selection of the poems: beginning with "Beginning", the poems fall into distin categories: aphoristic lines - "Beginning", "Fight", "Truth", "Sequend give way to romantic monologues, and then the solemn proclamation follow suit. Densely packed concepts-almost everything from the mundane traffic light ("At The Traffic Lights") to the abstract "Poetr elicits a response in the poet, though the imagery is never cliched: the treatment of this mundaneness, like the "image of the skeleton" is refuses "to leave the rear view mirror until the next crossing."

Perhaps both the poets share a point of camaraderie on the thematic scale, though that does not necessarily define my raison det of clubbing them here in this review - both have moved love poor closer to the younger readers and poets in Oriya. "Tourist" by Dr. You lived here once;/ so there is in this city/ no discontent,/ ugliness, no disorder (am I reminded of Ismail Kadare, the Albania poet?), though, both have achieved it by different techniques: Distriction of the poets of the p more distanced in his expressions while Rath appears a part of his post persona. To quote a term from Indian aesthetic theories, perhaps her the poets in t the poets intend to make use of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the same of the romantic rasa; though they do not select the romantic rasa; the romantic r effect the same bhava in the reader.

The English renderings of the poems for both the collections related to the poems for both the poems for absolutely crease-free, and at places outshine the beauty of the organic grant of the organic (for example, "What shall I wear on the Day of my Death?" in Rath

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text or "My World" by Das...). The poets are the translators and the pieces excel in their linguistic soundness. Though one thought of Translation Studies might debate the authenticity of the translated outcomes here as model representations (plainly because the liberty a writer takes with his work while translating may not be available to an outsider-translator), the net gain goes to the reader.

Lipipuspa Nayak

Homage to Truth by R.N. Raghavan, Hyderabad, Kinnera Publications, 2005, Pp.322, Rs.150

When I finished reading the above novel to the last page I felt both stirred and doomed. It was fascinating to observe the way the author, R.N.Raghavan, has brought into play a whole slew of the recent and present-day happenings partly as a backdrop and partly as an integral part of the story. There are references to Babri Masjid, the Taliban attack on the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan, the Kashmir problem, LTTE, ISI, Naxals, Mother Teresa, Sister Nirmala, film actress Sridevi, the Sangh Pariwar, SIMI, communal clashes, a deadly bomb blast, its investigation and fallout, the cabinet meeting and so on. If the object of such a kaleidoscopic treatment was to capture the spirit of the times the author has carried it through. I shall revert to the second part of my reaction a little later.

The truth about a literary work is obviously not comparable with the truth of a mathematical formula because the former has much to do with the sociological, historical and even psychological forces at work which are complex and sometimes difficult to comprehend and analyse but cannot be ignored even in the context of the formalist focus on a verbal structure. But the author, an engineer by profession, has tried to come to grips with the inexactitudes of the human situation by focusing mainly on the strengths and weaknesses of the principal characters and bringing out realistically the frustration and failure of the innocents caught in a political web in the aftermath of a bomb blast in the heart of Andhra Pradesh. Titled *Homage to Truth*, the central

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theme of the novel could perhaps be termed no less appropriately the anguish of human experience' because of the travesty of justice. And this seems to be the grim truth of our times brought into sharp focus through the gutsy depiction of the stark realities of the contemporary scene.

It is not uncommon to hear of people languishing in jail and the guilty going scot-free for want of evidence or because of prevaricated or doctored evidence. What an irony when towards the end of the novel, Muniswamy Naidu, Additional IG of prisons has to admit "...Culprits in criminal cases are never punished...the innocents like inside the prison walls. Culprits walk in streets.' As per the judgement pronounced on 6th May 2003, Gopi, Abraham and Syed Jafri were found guilty and awarded life imprisonment though they were not instrumental in causing the bomb blast. Tajuddin, the dreaded criminal who had masterminded the whole operation, disturbing the peaceth procession of Lord Ganesha, absconded in mysterious circumstance

The book has been rightly dedicated to all those men and women who have been falsely implicated in the crimes not committed by the and confined in the prison, suffering silently with courage and conviction while hoping against hope for truth to prevail as the days day on interminably. Swami Paramarthananda, President Ramakrisha Math, Domalguda, Hyderabad, however dwells on another aspect a truth when he says in his foreword that the first attribute of Godi Truth. God is the embodiment of Truth, according to the holy sent tures. Truth is not merely the expression of a word but a way of the Island of the conveyed in terms of religion it is called Vedanta and people as a great cultural heritage of eternal values truth has become a casual in India. No wonder, Swami Vivekananda said, "Truth does not people to the society; it is the society that should pay homage truth."

A work of fiction perhaps offers the writer a splendid opportunity to portray reality more realistically than the verbiage of routine description. This may be mainly because the characters, thouse fictional, are potential living realities, capturing through their work and action, the quintessence of the mood of the age and the aspiration of the time while vividly profiling the diverse facets of the humber experience. Judged in this respect, characterization in this novel large meets the demands of the situation and can agitate the reader again the injustices inherent in the criminal justice system vitiated by the motivated political manoeuvrings.

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The character that imperceptibly comes to mind while deliberating on this point is Abraham. A young Keralite Christian, he prays regularly in the Hindu temple and adopts some of the Hindu customs while evincing a keen interest in the ancient Indian scriptures. Though busy as a post master he is an aficionado of music. With no bureaucratic airs, he endears himself to all irrespective of caste, creed and religion. His report on the happenings in his village sent to a newspaper is so impressive that the editor promptly offers him the job of a reporter in his paper!

Kanchana's unhappy marriage followed by the gruesome suicide is one of the moving events of the story. Vanitha's death in a road accident is as tragic as intriguing. It is, however, Mythili, aka Roja, who steals the show. Her mother's death at an early stage causes a vacuum in her life. She acquires the name Rosa because her face resembles a rose bud. While in the second year of the Master's degree course in Central University she has to submit a project report as a part of the procedural requirement to get the degree. While ruminating on what could be the subject of her paper, an idea flashes that she can draw upon her own experiences of village life, the joy, the trauma and the injustices which rankles with her. She titles her project: "Homage to Truth". Gopal Sharma is shown as an orthodox Brahmin with a progressive outlook, serving as a guiding star to the village folks. A host of other characters are woven into the texture of the story highlighting the conflicts between tradition and modernity, treason and patriotism, good and evil.

Sadly enough, the linguistic and grammatical inadequacies are too many to ignore. Sample these: 'She left to heaven...' (page 107), 'She reminded of his great qualities.' (page 35), 'What picnic we are like Kashmir here.' (page 73), 'She was upset with the manner in which both Amala sidelined her.' (page 73), 'She started questioning Naidu in typical telugu malayalm mix. '(page 41), 'foot steps' (page 100), 'overhearing the conversation.' (pages 46 and 47), 'fore fathers' (page 112), 'Where abouts of Tajuddin could not be established.' (page 290), 'Gopal Sharma wondered how this could happen?' (page 49) and many others. It is distressing to see an otherwise remarkable effort blemished by avoidable errors.

M.N. Chatterjee

Narrative of the Village: Centre of the Periphery, by Jasbir Jain, Jaipur Rawat Publications, Pp.302, Rs.595/-

Is village an exaggerated 'myth'? A state of mind? How does one arm at an acceptable definition of 'village'? Do 'village' and 'city' complete ment or contradict each other? Or, do they overlap into each other in some strange and absurd way? Could they be segregated neatly into watertight compartments? These are some of the questions taken up for discussion in the book under review, Narrative of the Village Centre of the Periphery, edited by Jashir Jain. Her attempt to local the 'village' in the light of available narratives and to place it in the collective psyche of the nation certainly fulfils a longtime need.

Textualising 'village' in the larger socio-politico-cultural conter and by subjecting it to elaborate scrutiny, examining the age old power equations and demystifying the romantic halo around the 'village'; Jin has given the rural-urban debate an altogether fresh dimension. In the preface itself, she sets the tone of the book by confessing candida

> It was disturbing to be always working with the polarities of margins and centres. These kind of divisionary approaches are overlaid with power struggles and inequalities. Increasingly one feels the need to dismantle such juxtapositions and oppositional categories and replace them either with multiplicities or with similarities and simultaneities.

Introducing the volume of essays she sums up the whole effor

The village is placed on the periphery and yet it remains the centre of the periphery, effectively destabilizing the very notion of a city centre, and dislocating the centre-periphery equation.

In between these two astute observations lie twenty-two articles of varying depth and scholarship by eminent academi-critics who for on the various aspects of 'village' as portrayed in our literary texts, fland foll-culture Til and folk cultures. The end product turns out to be a rich mission ful page as portrayed in our literary team, insightful narrative placing 'village' at the centre of our imaginate Contributors to this volume of essays seem unanimous in

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with a c reads li view that, in the context of culture studies in a globalised world, 'village', as opposed to the 'city', can no longer be explained away in black and white terms or by any simplistic generalizations. In her article 'Village as protagonist in socio political system', Renuka Pamecha alerts us to the grim reality as how the quiet placidity of the village has given way to the spread of casteism, vote bank politics and how an otherwise harmonious milieu stands precariously balkanized along the bloody caste and communal lines by falling prey to nefarious political designs.

Kumool Abbi in her rather longish and elaborate essay debunks the assumption that the real India lives in villages and exists in some sort of 'timelessness'. She goes on to say that, such a view is "more of an ideological construction than a historical fact." She makes responsible the substantial body of literature, mainstream films and other

aesthetic medium for perpetration of such a 'myth'.

Santosh Gupta blasted yet another myth that village folks in India remain cloistered within a 'time wrap'—inside the cocoon of their own small universe, completely oblivious of the vast world outside. If it were so, how could anybody explain the political awareness which sparked off sporadic peasant uprisings against the oppressive and feudal system of zamindari with its revolt centres in the 'village'. To prove her point she sites fictional works of Premchand, Raja Rao, Sarat Chandra, Gopinath Mohanty and Tagore where 'village' is treated as an important protagonist in political and social intermingling. Her well researched essay 'Revolt and Reforms in rural India' vindicates her stand that Indian village, so diverse in people and their character, geo-politics and social idiosyncrasies has always defied any attempt of straight jacketing or pigeonholing by maintaining all along an autonomous and independent character of its own as also a unique self propelled thrust.

In her article "Wo(man) is not made for Defeat" Usha Bande deliberately takes a gendered view and juxtaposes the village women along the feudal and patriarchal set up of the village. Referring to various narratives of fiction with 'women' as protagonist (like Kamala Markandaya's, Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve, Mulk Raj Anand's Gouri (The old women and the cow) she shows how the village womenfolk, generally thought to be meek, docile, passive, and almost faceless could be so assertive as to demolish their stereotypical confines and break free from the shackles of patriarches.

from the shackles of patriarchy when situation so demanded of them.

Veena Jain begins her essay, 'Power Politics from Class to Caste'
with a quote from Kancha Ilaiah, the dalit activist and academic, which
reads like this:

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Durga Prasad Panda / 181

Every village is a political power centre. Political power in a village community operates both at micro level and the macro level. However, our consciousnesses are formed in such a way that many of the operations of power become invisible

Critically examining the portrayals of village life in the writing of Premchand (Godan) and Limble (Hindu) alongwith other literary works such as Takazhi S Pillai's Chemeen, Renu's Maila Anchal, Rap Rao's Kanthapura she throws light on how shifting patterns of power affect the village life. She also dares to admit that Premchand, despite his reformist zeal and progressive pretences, addressed only 'class' problems—that too more as an 'outsider' who belonged to the upper class and did not have the first hand experience of a low caste dalit life their trials and vicissitudes of life. While Limble's Hindu drives how the point that it is 'caste' not 'class' which has become the most potent factor which determines the very nature and movement of power inside a village, thus shifting the focus from class conflicts to caste rigidity-from the enemy outside to enemy within.

Rama Rani Lai concentrates on Khuswant Singh's Train to likistan and skillfully vivisects the plot, characters, events, background including the village topography with the virtuosity of a scholar will draw our attention to 'Mano Majra', Khuswant's fictional village, we show how a village in the backdrop of the Partition frenzy respondent to a set of highly sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensational turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensation and turn of events when the very moral fabrical sensation at the very moral sensation at the very moral

of the villagefolk is at stake.

Both Avinash Jodha and Urmil Talwar approach Rahi Mason Reza's Adha Gaon from different angles but say almost the same think. While Avinash Jodha believes that 'Village', as depicted in Adha Gao is lot more than simply a geographical space—a space which is not in alive to history but an active participant in its making, Talwar view the novel Adha Gaon as a classic documentation of human suffering and melodrama and those who inhabit the milieu are destined confront the issue of language, culture, caste and religion. Both established centrality of village in occupying both the real and imagined space of our life.

Articles by Anisur Rahman, Avadhesh K. Singh, Ameena Kansari, Bandana Chakraborty, Madhuri Chatterjee, Vrinda Mathuri Sarojini, Neelam Raisinghani, Jessy Mani, Sonu Shiva, Prema Bisha Supriya Agrawal and Preeti Bhatt contribute in their own way reinforce the idea that 'village' has always had a strong presence in very psyche of our people as borne by the popular narratives and other popular narratives and popular

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A Lea Pp. 1 aesthetic mediums; giving all along a new thrust to our understanding of rural-urban dialectic.

Though it may seem intriguing, the fact, however, remains that in the post modern era of shifting centres and unstable peripheries the very idea of 'centre' and 'periphery' as separate and independent entities crumble like a pack of cards. In this context 'village' could be seen both as a 'centre' and 'periphery' or as centre of the periphery' as the sub title of the book suggests.

However, this sort of an edited book often gets vulnerable atleast on one count—unless variety is ensured to a sufficient degree, an otherwise nice effort runs the risk of ending in a fiasco by needless rehash of themes and stereotyping of issues. I am happy to say that this has been avoided and the editor has to be credited for taking enough care to ensure that the volume becomes 'a salad bowl' of ideas and opinions and not just a 'melting pot'.

Just one printing mistake in a 300 page volume! Pather Panchali is authored by Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyaya and not 'Chattopadhyaya' as mentioned quite inadvertently (P-5). On the whole, the book is rightly conceived, flawlessly produced, brilliantly edited and a welcome addition to the growing body of insightful and critical writing, in English today.

Durga Prasad Panda

A Leaf in the Stream by Sridhar Das, Bhubaneswar, Rupantar, 2006, Pp. 183, Rs. 270/-

I Know we have a fashion of saying such and such an event was the turning-point in my life. But we shouldn't say it. We should merely grant that its place as *last* link in the chain makes it the most conspicuous link; in real importance it has no advantage over any of its predecessors."

Mark Twain.1

Autobiographies and biographies today rank among the best-Durga Prasad Panda / 183

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ined spar a Mathu a Bishno on way s ence in the sellers although in the post-structuralist era, autobiographies/biographies are out of favour in literit cirles, where it is believed that the author of a text is 'dead'. Popular with a large number of serious and fun-loving readers in every country, autobiographical writings reflect not only the quality of an individual mind and life but also the life of a nation at a given period of time. Fakir Mohan Senapati's Atmajeevancharita (Story of My Life) and Gandhi's An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth both appeared in the year 1927. Nirad C Chaudhuri's Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, an equally landmark book, came out in 1951. All the three autobiographies reflect what the popular 19th century British writer Hazlin called the "Spirit of the Age". They are eminent contributions to contemporary history.

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918) was the pioneer autobiographer in Oriya literature. In the brief 'Author's Preface' to his autobiography he observes, as Gandhi does in his 'Introduction' to My Experiments: "For the last four or five years, a few friends and some educated young men, who are like sons to me, have been urging me to set down the story of my life. I find it hard to ignore their request." Senapati laments that Oriya language is "particularly deficient in autobiographies." He goes on to add: "But so is my insignificant life in the important events that make autobiographies worthwhile."

The tone of humility that marks the spirit of Fakirmohan and Gandhi in their work as autobiographers is also markedly the vein which Sridhar Das's autobiography in Oriya, titled Sua Muhama Patara is written. A Leaf in the Stream, the book under review, is an excellent translation of the original Oriya by Mary Mohanty.

In humility its narrator/author says:

I have always looked upon myself as a leaf floating down a stream. I never knew which direction my leaf would take...It has joined hundreds of leaves on its way and it has drifted away from them. Some leaves have already sunk. One day this leaf will also sink suddenly and disappear. Its existence will be blotted out. (179-81)

It is difficult to pronounce whether writing the story of one life reflects an autobiographer's 'egoism' or urge for self-submission the judgement of the reader. Karan Singh, for instance, holds the view that "To write about oneself involves, inevitably, a curious combination

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of egoism and introspection, especially if it covers both inner and outer dimensions of life."5 (180)

The, situation will, no doubt, vary from author to author, depending largely on their own personality traits. As an autobiographer, Sridhar Das will belong to the tradition of Fakirmohan and Gandhi who, unlike Nirad C Chaudhuri or Karan Singh, are free from 'egoism'. A Leaf in the Stream, is an open diary: a straight-forward narration of a selection of events and situations connected with the author's life without any attempt at self-dramatisation or fantasisation. In its unostentatiously plain style, commonsensical approach to lifesituations and candid self-analysis exercise in self-exploration. Simultaneously, the narrative also aspires to be a celebration of plain and simple life.

> What direction my floating life-leaf will take and who guides it, I do not know. Now, at the dusk of my life, I feel utterly helpless. At times I feel I am the most helpless creature on earth. I have slept in a hut and also in a pucca house made of bricks. I have endured biting cold unable to afford warm clothing and I have warmed myself under shawls worth hundreds of rupees. I have walked hundreds of miles on foot, and rode on horses, elephants and motor cars.

> I have watched silent films and talkies. On television, I have watched man landing on the moon and bringing stones from there. I have eaten plain rice and also rice eaten with ghee. I do not know if I have become a poor man or a rich man. Rich or poor are relative terms after all....I have often considered myself utterly unhappy. But I cannot say whether there are people who are not unhappier than me. Perhaps, like light and darkness, happiness and unhappiness complement, and co-exist with, each other. (180)

General and philosophical reflections such as the above, however, are minimal. The autobiography shows no sign of philosophical/spiritual self-reflexiveness of the kind that one finds in The Confessions of St. Augustine, for instance, or in the autobiographical sections of Tennyson's In Memoriam. Its strength ironically lies in its unpretentious modesty: its sensitive perception and portrayal of life in day-today situations, which may be filled with surprises. Its delicate handling of simple occurrences in their often-startling dimensions is reminiscent

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of the manner in which the eminent American writer Emerson viewed art. He said: "Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing. All great arts have been simple..."

In the art of manipulation of memory the author of A Leaf in the Stream is remarkably pragmatic. "What governs one's choice of memories?" asks Agatha Christie in her posthumously published Autobiography." Life is like sitting in a cinema. Flick! Here am I, a child eating eclairs on my birthday. Flick! Two years have passed and I am sitting on my grandfather's lap, being solemnly trussed up as a chicken just arrived from Mr. Whiteley's...and in between...long empty space of months or even year's...." In A Leaf in the Stream, chosen event of the author's life have similarly been telescoped, ordered, paused reversed and re-ordered by the use of the cinematic technique. Intriguing snippets of memories of the author's experiences as a school teacher his primary vocation and delight in life in some half-a-dozen schools and finally as a Lecturer in Cuttack's Utkal Christian College, have been dexterously collaged within the framework of the narrative to recreate the thrills of real life experience.

Take for instance, the story of the author's stint at Boudgarha Headmaster of King Edward VIII School (which he wished to be renamed after late Joginder Dev, father of the Ruler of the State at that time). The narrative is gripping from the very beginning as the author describes his incredible journey to Boudgarh. Travelling find by train to Meramandli, from there by bus to Rairakhole, then bullock-cart ride to village Kiakata and, finally sailing across the new Mahanadi to Boudgarh. Equally curious are the episodes of the authorient and prudent Dewan of the state. Initially full of admiration the new Headmaster for his able and enthusiastic involvement in the launching of programmes of educational innovation and expansion they later fell out with him because of minor misunderstandings.

A crusader in the cause of the preservation and development of Oriya language and culture in the outlying Oriya-speaking areas, the author taught Oriya to school students who were being taught another language instead of their mother-tongue. His spirited efforts in the direction link him to the lineage of those valiant makers of modern Orissa: Madhusudan Das, Fakirmohan Senapati and others.

Following the example of the meticulous and thorough scholars ship of late Arta Ballabh Mohanty, doyen of modern scholars produced several international classics translated by himself into Original Produced among those are: Hitopadesh, Panchatantra, Gulliver's Translated

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Oliver Twist, two volumes of Tolstoy's stories and a selection of stories by Gorky and Chekov.

He also prepared sound critical editions of several Oriya classics, such as: Radhanath Ray's Chilika Dinakrushna Das's Rasakallola, Abhimanyu Samant Singhara's Bidagdhachintamani and Bhakta Charan Das's Mathuramangal. He was widely known in Orissa as a grammarian for his two grammar books in Oriya, out of which Sarbasara Byakaran (Essential Common Grammar) was in use for more than thirty years. Born and brought up in life, like his father, in circumstances of abject poverty, he lived a full life. He was sought after, admired, loved, conspired against and "cheated again and again." Yet he continued to trust people as before, and his love of the human world remained undiminished. A caring father of three sons and a daughter, he had the joy of seeing all of them become successful achievers in life. Husband of a self-abnegating woman of the house, he was a man of the world, to whom life's pitfalls and inconveniences were to be faced in a spirit of adventure, the credo of living of the well-known British author and humorist G K Chesterton. Public recognition and honour came to him late in life. An Orissa Sahitya Akademi award was presented to him in 1978. But more than such honour, he valued his contacts with some of the leading, historic figures of Orissa and the nation, like: Madhusudan Das, Gopabandhu Das, Ashutosh Mukherjee and Lala Lajpat Rai. He adored great people, but chose to remain an humble and introspective commoner. Advancing in years, he felt a sense of fulfillment reflecting on his crowded past. But awed by the 'life to come' he concludes his story in humility and in a spirit of self-submission:

I know my time is up. I do not know what lies beyond death, but one has to believe in the consequences of one's actions.... How aâ I to face God?..... All I can do now is to ask for God's forgiveness and mercy. (181)

G.K. Das

Notes:

 See: "The Turning-point in My Life," The Complete Essays of Mark Twain,ed. Charles Neider, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. 1963, Pp. 477-78

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Senapati, Fakirmohan, Story of My Life, Trans. from the original Onio Atmajeevancharita by Jatindra K Nayak and Prodeopta Das, Cuttack Vidyapuri, 2004, Gandhi, M.K., An Autobiography or My Experiments with Truth, Ahmedabat Navjivan Press, 1927, ix, "Four or five years ago, at the instance of some of my nearest co-workers, I agreed to write my autobiography."

Senapati, Story of My Life, x

This and all subsequent references to A Leaf in the Stream are to Rupantar, Bhubaneswar, edn. 2006; for the passage cited see p.180

Singh, Karan "Preface" to Autobiography, 4th revised edn. New Delli 5.

Oxford Univ. Press, 1994

See Emerson, R.W. "Art", The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson 6. ed. Brooks Atkinson New York: The Modern Library, 1950, p.311

Christie Agatha An Autobiography, London: Collins, 1965, p.13

Home by Manju Kapur, New Delhi, Random House India, 2006, Pa 337, Rs.395/-

First, the story. As outlined by the author in a sort of prologue. The Banwari Lal family belonged to a class whose skills had been honed over generations to ensure prosperity in the market-place. The marriages augmented, their habits conserved. From an early age chi dren were trained to maintain the foundation on which these home rested. The education they received, the values they imbibed, the alliances they made had everything to do with protecting the steady stream of gold and silver that burnished their lives. Those who less against the grain found in their homes knives that wounded, and one the damage had been done, gestures that reconciled.

There is something unusually characteristic about Manju Kaput an uncanny insight into the trading community of the urban middle class in India—especially Punjabis uprooted through the partition d the country. This was also the high-point of her first two novel Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman as well. She is an elegation writer with a simple, uncomplicated narrative style. Her characters at unpretentious (even if some of them sound too sugar-coated), deep involved in situations (at times tediously so) neatly etched and carre out by both individual destinies, and their creator. Raw and really the extent that they could transport many readers into their own family So the Banwari Lal 'Flome' is in Karol Bagh, a hugely crowde histories, though not necessarily comfortably.

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business-residential area in New Delhi dominated by Punjabi refugees from Pakistan, as are the areas surrounding it. Banwari Lal, then 32, had run a flourishing fabric retail outlet in the upmarket Anarkali commercial centre in Lahore from where he had to flee with his pregnant wife and her jewellery, a seven-year-old son, Yashpal, and a two-year-old daughter, Sunita when his shop became one of the earliest targets of communal frenzy. The wife's jewellery came in handy in buying a small house and renting a shop to sell cloth in the refugee-infested Karol Bagh.

The 337-page story deals with the trials and tribulations of Banwari Lal & Sons' (Pyare Lal and their families, much of the narrative is, however, devoted to the happenings in the family of Yashpal and his wife, Sona, the adopted "dark, ungainly, silent, sullen child" Vicky (brought into the house after the death of Sunita, and put in the care of a reluctant childless Sona: "A borrowed child? Ten years old? From another woman's womb?"), his wife, Asha; daughter Nisha born tenyears after marriage, courtesy many seers' blessings; son Raju, and, in due course, his wife Pooja. Predictably, considerable narrative has been devoted to the only daughter in the whole family, and her growing up...till she eventually gets married to a widower. And the story ends. No other conclusions desired, or needed.

Manju Kapur is an unabashed chronicler of the urban middle class, and seemingly excels in depicting it as honestly as possible. Home, in that sense, is a worthy successor to her earlier attempts in the same direction. It does, however, have a flip side. It leaves gaps. It raises questions in the reader's mind. Several subsidiary characters given undue weightage initially, notably Vicky and Suresh (for a variety of reasons), disappear without a justification or trace subsequently. An expected later—even an accidental one because the character continues to erode Nisha's consciousness until almost the end—encounter with Suresh, even after she becomes an entrepreneur and moves around town, never materializes. A first love she finds hard to forget otherwise.

Although aware of a writer's limitations in choosing characters in furthering the narrative, one does feel the step-motherly treatment to Pyarelal and his sons, Ajay, Vijay and their spouses. The elaborate recounting of the Karva Chauth Katha and Vat Savitri Katha do not add anything to even an evocation of the milieu. Similarly, the space given to Nisha's nagging skin disease seems unwarranted as it has no bearings. Even the husband fails to spot any patches on an otherwise blemished body. There is also, at times, the uneasy feeling that the

Suresh Kohli / 189

narrative is unnecessarily dragging towards a contrived end. The rative could have ended with Nisha's late marriage to the widower Arvind. No. It seems the author wanted to redeem the heroine through the birth of twins, and that too, a boy and a girl. The conclude

passage is self-explanatory:

Forty days later, during the naming ceremony, Nisha sat in from of the bavan, and through the smoke gazed at her tiny babies. The colour was the way hers had been before blemishes had come upon her life. The mother-in-law sitting next to her held the fragile boy her lap. Just like his grandfather, she murmured as she caressed cheek, a statement she made everyday, to the approval of all. The more robust girl lay balanced on her mother's knees, eyes shut, cradle co stuck to her scalp.

One wonders if the novelist wanted to make a definitive point here, considering looking at her during the nine months of pregnant almost everyone had predicted it would be a boy. And now a 'robus'

girl, and a 'fragile' boy?

The narrative continues:

Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine.

On the positive side, Manju Kapur's depiction of the Punjabi whe middle class's vicissitudes, moorings and milieu is almost flawless. Bot the narrative and the characters seem lived and vivid, not harboure or observed. Her language is simple and nearly flawless. There is a groping around in the abstract. There is hardly any attempt to devia from the main story line. No pontification. No needless showdown which would have been perfectly in order in the kind of family crowded by a battery of housewives, which sought to be depicted There are no dark secrets lurking in the shadows once the narration of the shadows once the finds the right rhythm. In fact, one wonders how the novelist escape the temptation of presenting more seedy scenes between a wicked Vid and a naïve Nisha. Or, for that matter, with Suresh, and their escapation the charles in the shady one-room hole.

On the whole, a very readable novel about the middle

milieu.

Suresh Koh

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Making a Poem by Vihang Naik, Allied Publishers Ltd., 2004. Pp.48 Rs. 230/-

The aim of the book, Making a Poem, by Vihang Naik, is to make the reader aware of the process of writing poetry. The book is divided into the following sections: Are You Looking for that Poet? The Poet as a Young Man, Making a Poem, A Poem Comes Alive and A Poet.

One of the pleasures gained by reading Vihang Naik's poetry is the awareness that every poem, both singly and when placed together as a body of work, demonstrates a belief in the possibilities language might have to truthfully and energetically communicate the writing experience. Naik does not distract himself with enquiries into problems of subjectivity and textuality, and although many poems in this collection are innovative and exploratory, Naik has faith in a poetry that can presume to speak of the poet's life with clarity and wisdom. In this way his work should appeal to the shared experience of other writers and their common histories, and seek to render the function of poetry as a vehicle for insight, as a conduit between the individual and his wider readership. Making a Poem is, therefore, an intriguing work to appear at a time when what could be called a "revival" in poetry writing is taking place.

"Are You Looking for that Poet?" the first section of the book, explores the theme that correspondences between lived experience and constellations of memory, concept and language can stimulate the creation of a poem. Naik's references to "dreams" and "secrets" also suggest, in addition to their being put to use as tropes of the transcendent, a broader sensitivity to the materials of experience and understanding. The first poem in this section, "Woman and Man", performs a gesture of "myth-making": "You / cannot make a poem / that would vanish in the night." The poem is short and simple; the poet's physical and imaginative thoughts generate a poem that is intuitive and thoughtful. Naturally, the world of the poet, if imagined infinitely, will somehow always exceed the capacity for language to describe it, and Naik appears to say to the reader in "A Reader's Response" that the act of reading poetry is not a harmless process: "Reading a book / of poems may not be / that innocent." In this way he places himself within what could loosely be defined as a hermetic tradition, where the action of language and myth via poetic consciousness enacts a

Patricia Prime / 191

revelation of the moment of creativity.

In the second section, "The Poet as a Young Man", Naik focus on the young writer's development as a poet: "At seventeen you will on the young writer's development as a poet: "At seventeen you will on the young writer's development as a poet: "At seventeen you will on the young writer's development as a poet: "At seventeen you will be a poet of the young writer's development as a poet: "At seventeen you will be a poet of the young writer's development as a poet of the young w a poem." ("At Seventeen"). The poems are made more interesting their constant focus on sensual experience, the poet's delight in the "opaque zone / of language", "a blank stare / against the page / of time" and "He saw an animal in front / of a mirror. / A portrait / of the poet as a young man." The combined processes of sensation and memon are marked by Naik as the primary ground from which proceed other processes in the making of the poet. For instance, poems such as "At Seventeen", "A Play", "A Story", show the poet working toward his goal of achieving a successful poem. Naik articulates in section? "Making a Poem", the process whereby the creation of a poem is h and understood, the poet's experiences are taken into his poems, tothe extent that the poet simultaneously opens and expands to describe sensations: "How about making a poem within / a poem?" "She gar me a bunch of papers / to write an Epic about her." "She became gazal in return. / First silence is poetry then words."

Of course, Naik is not unaware of the drift towards self-generative rhetoric. His poems, particularly in the collection's next section, 1 Poem Comes Alive", often ironically invert the push towards total knowledge and experience. Naik reminds us that all forms of knowledge edge require some form of measurement, that against the possibilities of code there is also the fact of the single instance: that observation language and description fold all events back into history. For example in the poem "The Pen" he writes, "Now that the words / have cor, to an end / You search your poem / in the silence of death." Makes a Poem is deepened in effect by the humility of such lines, and the that many poems in the collection trace the impact of personal history the many and varied moments of creating a poem and the poet's great understanding of his crast. For example, in the fine poem "A Poe Comes Alive", Naik maps out the way in which a poem instils life

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The final section, "A Poet", when only death can silence the poet, rob him of his words, and bring an end to experience, is a pattern of anger, memories and observations that work together both to collapse and extend historical time, forward and back, across the space of the poet's intuition. Where, in the poem "Wanted" he says,

tonight I am awake with the paper and pen

wors hit me back in anger that formed from this same ink

themselves a guilt-point searching the lost faces

WANTED

by the reader

Here he makes a statement about his anger at not being able to create, and his guilt that there is nothing to give to the expectant reader. In the "Making of a Poet", he questions himself and his process, asking "did you entrust your hand to move / or make a poem?" But in the final poem "A Poet", he is able to come up with something he sees as far from perfect: "a blotted / image / a poem." This final poem in the collection returns us to the conceptual and emotional moment of the book's beginning, in which the poet and the poem cannot be separated, and the breach between the world and language can be managed by attunement, relaxation, the flux of emotion, event and perspective. In this collection Naik shows us that alongside discourse, art and a desire to know, creating poetry is also a form of knowing.

Patricia Prime

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Ninety-Nine Words: A Collection of Contemporary English Poems, Edited by Manu Dash, (Place Panchabati Publications, 2006, 188Pp., Rs.35) (\$12.99), Hardbound, ISBN 81-86790-42-X

There are anthologies and then there are anthologies. The anthologies of Indian English poetry titled Ninety Nine Words edited by Man Dash, despite carrying poems of practically all important poets (including Vikram Seth, C P Surendran, Dilip Chitre, Sudeep Sen, I Satchidanandan, Keki Daruwalla, Ranjit Hoskote, Tabish Khair, Ann Chaudhuri, etc) and also including some of the upcoming ones, fall to come up with any editorial input on the collection to provide the reader with the perspective that should generally guide the publication of an anthology. This makes it merely a compilation of some poem of some poets that could have been very well put together by a reader in the form of a diary by making a photocopy of the poems from here and there.

The subtitle 'A Collection of Contemporary English Poem inadvertently takes a grand leap towards the continuing debate about the placing of Indian Literature in English that has evolved from being termed Anglo-Indian literature to Indo-Anglican Literature to Indian English Literature to the now somewhat more acceptable Indian literature in English. As a way of suggestion, the subtitle could have better represented by suffixing 'from India' to it. It is so because it goes contrary to what the Editor states in the Preface (that reads more like an essay on 'What is Poetry' and could have been carried anywhere and not necessarily relevant to the present anthology):

All the poets of this anthology were born and educated in lade and are well-acquainted with Indian life and sensibility. They grew with a vernacular language. English came into their life later, and start on with them.

The use of the colonial 'vernacular' instead of 'regional' or the dian' may be objected to since the term has long been given a dian' burial by academicians in the post-Independence era.

Despite these Editorial flip-flops, one may still like to go through the poems selected in the anthology for the fact that they represent both the strong points as well as limitations of Indian poetry in English the appropriate for the fact that they represent the poetry in English the appropriate for the fact that they represent the poetry in English the appropriate for the fact that they represent the poetry in English the poetry in E

It appears one of the editorial parameters of the selection of poems has been the preference for short-length poems. From the

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perspective, one does come across some very succinct poems where images are, as it were, telescoped. Daruwalla's poem "Bars" can be cited here:

If you want a cage,
my dear
you do not have
to travel far.
If you want to feel
hemmed in, you'll be hemmed in.
Look for scars
you'll be full of scars.
Even light can turn
into a cage.
The cage of light
has seven bars.

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Sudeep Sen's "One Moonlit December Night," a poem having six lines, can also be referred to in this context:

One moonlit December night You came knocking at my door, I took my time to open. When I did, There was just a silk scarf, Frayed, half-stuck in the latch.

Or take "End Note" by Dilip Chitre

It feels
So easy
To be
One
In a billion.
That's just statistics
For you
And for me
Poetry.

However, one is constrained to say that the strong points showcase the limitations of Indian poetry in English too, as far as the poems in this anthology are concerned. It baffles one indeed as to why can not Indian poetry in English spread its wings touching upon, nay, confronting head on, the changing social, political, economic relationships in contemporary India as an insider? Why does it continue to be just a timid

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muse touching upon these aspects in a muffled, muttering and ambiguous tone (not to be confused with subtle perceptions of change); appears as if an Indian poet writing in English leads life purely on the level of psychology devoid of any social or political content!

While Indian poetry in English has been able to overcome in habit of invoking the Ganges, or a Lord Shiva here and there in the name of sprinkling 'Indian' sensibility in its corridors of images, in appears that poets are still to make up their mind regarding their viewpoints on some of the changes sweeping Indian society in terms of social, political, economic mobility challenging the way we view tradition as well as what we consider 'modern'. Some critical perception of tradition is seen in a poem like "At Puri" by Manu Dash, the law two stanzas of which are a bit bold:

Drinks are not free But diseases are. Opting to die in Puri Is a difficult task; So is to live.

Prom the time the rowdies
And the unruly
Made it their haven,
I have loathed Puri.

However, most of the poets appear quite busy muttering words to themselves without bothering to identify their own suffering with universal suffering, without bothering to open them up to the reader. A poem like "Home" by Arundhati Subramaniam stretches out to do that and it can be read on both personal and impersonal levels and is a successful poem precisely because of that:

Give me a home that isn't mine, where I can slip in and out of rooms without a trace, never worrying about the plumbing, the colour of the curtains, the cacophony of books by the bedside.

A home that I can wear lightly, where the rooms aren't clogged with yesterday's conversations,

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where the self doesn't bloat to fill in the crevices.

A home, like this body, so alien when I try to belong, so hospitable when I decide I'm just visiting.

Kumar Vikram

Shringara by Shanta Acharya, Nottingham, UK: Shoestring Press, 2006, Pp.61, £8.95

Shringara is Shanta Acharya's fourth collection of poetry, the first three being Not This, Not That (1994), Numbering Our Days' Illusions(1995) and Looking In , Looking Out (2005). The poems of Shringara embrace such themes as memory, time(past), samily, nature, fissures of human bonds, loneliness and the poetic process. Almost all the forty-eight poems of this volume are resonant with frank generosity and the vicissitudes of life. The diverse facets of the natural world and the multiple shades of home and family allure Shanta Acharya so much that these aspects constitute the theme-song of her fourth volume of poetry.

Her willing leap into the pool of memories creates a sense of presence through the metaphors of absence:

> If you had not stepped into that car, the car had broken down or the driver had taken a different route, the traffic lights had changed; if only some one had delayed your departure. ('What Might Have Been')

Some experiences of life and the threatening presence of death in life's carnival. The genuine sentiment of the poem makes Khurshid, wife of the poem makes Khurshid, wife of Keki Daruwalla, present in her absence. The poet is ready to record the particular experiences she encountered through the chain of events. Acharya compresses those particular experiences into a very

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Physical separation through death has been one of the moving haunting and captivating metaphors of Acharya's poems. Death being happen will be the beautiful the final biological experience makes nothing happen visibly, tangible and verifiably. The haunting presence of the metaphor of death inventor her poems with a sense of mystery; a sense which is unverifiable, and non-negotiable by reason or intellect:

> One day they took her away in an ambulance, she without saying goodbye; how can one heave one's heart, all strapped as if on a hearse? ('Goodbye')

The poet's individuality emerges through her intense person! involvement with the past that results in a series of sliding emotion shades 'racing through the tunnel of time':

> Moving homes, continents, hearts, taking what is needed, leaving all else behind, slippers , well-wishers, memories-

('Let Me Go')

Her search for identity is based on cogent reasons. For a poet of the Indian diaspora, identity becomes plural (partial?)—a curious mix betwee the native culture and the alien one. In her poem 'Speechless' she excel

> Life rushes past yesterdays. My body an alien, is no longer my ally-My words ,foetus stillborn; My screams ,children asleep in a house on fire.

The poet gives an intellectual twist to her thought-provoking lines. adds to the highly reflective and introspective character of Acharyl poems.

Shanta Acharya's perceptive self establishes a vital connection between her roots in India and the rootlessness in London, as 10 to values there are 1. values they embody and treasure. As a poet living in an alien conditions she has consumed so much of pain that springs from her lonelings. 'I oneliness' is a real treasure. As a poet living in an aller treasure. 'Loneliness' is a remarkable revelation of the poet gasping in 'an ideal of freedom and peace.' 'I'll in the springs from her to be an in that springs from her to be an interest of the poet gasping in 'an ideal of the poet gasping of freedom and peace.' This loneliness is inherent in the poet: "Distortion of the poet gasping in "Distortion of the poe loneliness the continents of yourself." The poet creates a greater of

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of human anguish and cognitive loneliness that rootless expatriates undergo under the alien sky.

Life envelops within its fold the solitude and transience of shared moments. She revisits her childhood harping on her gregarious attitude to fill in the spaces of her lonesome plight in the exile. In 'Family Portrait' she catalogues different episodes of her lived experiences with such minuteness and vividness that she is participating in 'life's carnival.' She treasures within herself the sweet memories of the past and all other events, which made the past eventful. She broods over the things lost in the journey through linear time. An exhilarating realization dawns in her poetic lines— 'remembering all is divine.'

'Cavern' is cave, dark and deep. 'Sleep' is the suspended form of activity and flow of energy. Metaphorically 'sleep' is imaged as an insect dreaming in its soft protective cover. For Acharya an image stitches together (in rich tapestry) unallied references/subjects. The revealing and farsighted metaphors are apposite notwithstanding their

obscurity for the unaided reader. For example,

Loneliness is the mother holding her son crucified. ('Loneliness')

The semantic obscurity of the image may pose an intellectual distance between the poet and a common reader.

When we read Shringara we sense a voice that makes us really feel at home with the one that speaks directly to our consciousness, a voice of nobility, aesthetics, sensibility and delicacy. Shringara is also an interesting work because of its lexical openness. Too many unglossed Indian words/phrases may cause semantic obscurity to a non-Indian reader. Shringara, Nirvana, Samsara, Sati, Samskara, Shunya, Rasa, Raga, Bhagya and Kismat are not just simple Indian words. They also carry cultural moorings of Indian society. We enjoy the manner in which her English is sprinkled with Indian sensibility. In her poem 'Sleep' Shanta Acharya is possibly exploring the Socio-linguistic reality in the post-colonial era that the Queen (the global code) is wearing a bindi (local colour). She belongs to the Indian diaspora but her style is enriched by her Indianness:

'Shiva's dambaru is ready for the dance to begin.'

Jaydeep Sarangi / 199

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Dambaru of Shiva is a symbol of destruction; chaos rules over the cosmos.

For Shanta Acharya, this cultural mosaic becomes the source vitality and power. Acharya has poems titled 'Shringara', 'Shung' and 'Aja', and many of her poems are tempered with references to places and personages in Orissa and to Hindu tradition and belief She has a poem 'Father's Day: 18 June 2000' in which she refers to her home- town Bhubaneswar extensively as she explores her "dissolving in losses":

> I learn how Orissa is recovering from the devastating cyclone, how people are coping with drought....

Alongside the linguistic mélange, there is the evidence of the poet concern for topical issues like '9/11', 'London: 7 July 2005' and grown suicide in Japan.

'9/11'is based on the tragedy caused by the terrorist attack or the World Trade Centre, New York. Three thousand lives "exiliguished in a single holocaust."

'London: 7 July 2005' is a poem on the series of bomb blasts in London. It caused a heavy death toll in the city:

> ...stumbling over bodies lying in the Underground station, some unaware of limbs missing.

Her poem 'Someone to Die With' focuses on how online technique's are used for group suicides. The poet's heart bleeds with pain:

> Hard for us to enter the fortress of the living, a sealed circular staircase.

Shanta Acharya refers to the communal violence at Godhra, Gujari which denigrated the secular face of our nation. Her reference to the super Cyclone in Orissa and its toll of human lives and property so intense that the recent past seems to have been pearled in the present

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Ineluctable Stillness (A collection of poems), by K.K. Srivastava, New Delhi, Evergreen Publications India Ltd., 2005, Pp.140, Rs.150/-

In the eight-page persuasive preface to this collection of poems. K.K. Srivastava pleads, "And finally, a request to the esteemed readers....The judgement is to be taken only after acquainting themselves with the whole and not with the parts alone." Quoting Alexender Pope (Whose couplets anyway, were complete in themselves), Srivastava insists for a holistic assessment. The poet's plea could earn a plausible justification had his work been an epic or a novel wherein the parts are secondary to the whole. In a book of poems as this, however, each poem is independent of the other or what we may say as 'absolute' for individual assessment. In such context, T.S.Eliot had rightly observed that every poem possesses a life of its own. Notably, Srivastava's poems display a pervasive influence of Eliot.

Srivastava's critical mind looms heavy on the lines at the risk of spontaneity. He assiduously brings to play the corpus of his literary sources hitch-hiking his readers to no logical conclusion and is content with his 'grotesque imagery' and 'longing for masked oblivion' ("An Evening"). Where he takes no recourse to literary inspiration, like in the poems. "The Reconteur's Dilemma" and the "Marginal Man," he is great deal original and moving. But this is a rare sight in his shorter poems which are rather developed on a cut-and-dry pattern in the garb of experimenting with the form:

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A Child?

("An Unstarred Question")

The contemporary paranoia is diagnosed by the poet in several poems. Its glaring reference is found in the poem, "Silence of an

Manohar Bandopadhyay / 201

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Agonised Mind." Here he confides to his readers: "A flurry of drolly cussedness gnawed at my nerves/Wrenching the hot bed of trivialities." His metaphors of silence, stillness or the noiselessness stand out as antithesis when one reflects over the tone and spirit of the poem which are rather vociferous and agile. A tempestuous instance is in the poem "Noiseless Perplexities" where the loud-throated words drive us to a storm of chaos: "Worries inside the worries, madness inside the madness/.... Convulsion within convulsions, wishful compulsive acts/Fib. rillated."

Srivastava is at his best in his longer poems which notwithstanding their droning prolixity possess a striking sweep of force and poetic fire. Two of these long poems set alongside are; "A Citadel of Arguments" and "Saturday Dinner Party". The former a thirty-six page poem is developed in fiftyfive sections. The poet brings to focus the quarrels amid the arguments where no one can stop unleashing the 'shreds of stillborn thoughts'. In this battle the wide prove fools and the 'dullards get a premium'. Far from being worked up one can delight in this game if he keeps himself detached:

The arguments counsel their reflections to commence journeys
Into the half clothed foundations of unclassified hypotheses.
Enjoy, enjoy, the incapacities of your termentors,
Rejoice at the incapability of your expectations,
But play the game when what awakes in you,
You find deep asleep."

Having played the full game of arguments, the poet comes to hold his view that these do serve his purpose even if things tail off into vagueness. He assuredly holds: "We hate to enter the citadel/Where arguments have no place."

One encounters the same psychologist approach to an event of every day life in the second long poem "Saturday Dinner Party". This nineteen-page poem take the readers to the surcharged atmosphere of the Saturday dinner party where "wives" and the waiters talk silently through their eyes: "They laugh/For, they have seen thousands of such drained men/And draining women." The poet displays a unique avidity of the eye and succeeds to dramatise the whole show with facility and case. The characters and their actions come to life in sequels of depiction and one has no difficulty to discover the influence of Pope whose remark "Belinda smiled and the world was gay" well illuminates the

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displ just read spor bring gaity and mirth of the party. The lone soul, symptomatic of the poet, keeping aloof is branded a 'misogynist'. When the party is over and all gone home, he spreads out his eyes to take a reflective stock:

Outside sad calmness shivering at the melee That have evacuated.

Mercifully.

Slowly linking tangible with invisibles,
He looks outside
And finds,
Melted fire, in the lawns outside, seeking,
Extra-ordinary inspiration from fading darkness.

The poet is less in hurry in his longer poems and therefore displays patience enough to bring his talent bear upon his lines skillfully just as ingeniously he develops his theme. The poem are no longer a ready writing; a hazard against which Dr. Johnson had warned us sportingly: "Ready writing makes not good writing; but good writing brings on ready writing."

Manohar Bandopadhyay



Manohar Bandopadhyay / 203

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Our Contributors

Akhtar, Javed (b. 1945) Urdu poet, film lyricist and writer; *Tarkash*, collection of lyrics, is his important published work; his poetry has been translated into Hindi, Bengali and other Indian languages; recipient of filmfare Award (10 times), Best Script Award (seven times), Best Lyricist Award etc. Add: 702, Sagar Samrat, Greenfield, Juhu, Mumbai 400 049.

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Nayak lator; glish; her cre for tel Nayak 756 100 Mohanty, Sachidananda. Critic and translator; his essays and articles have appeared in several leading journals; has edited Travel Writing and the Empire for Rupa & Co. and Literature and Colonial Orissa for Sahitya Akademi; has been honoured by Katha Award for outstanding translation, Katha British Council Translation Prize and University Grants Commission's "Career Award". Add: Professor, Dept. of English, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad 500046.

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Corrigendum

The review of the book Asian Englishes Beyond the Canons by Braj B. Kachru published in the Issue No. 231 was wrongly ascribed to Amiya Dev. It was reviewed by Pabitra Sarkar, who is a reputed scholar; critic, linguist and former Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. Add: 'Senjuti', 21 Kendura Main Road, Kolkata 700 084. The error is regretted.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

I first got to know K. Ayyappa Paniker when Sahitya Akademi invited him to Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in 1988 to participate in the 150th birth anniversary seminar on Bankimchandra. As the novice Regional Secretary of the Akademi's Eastern Regional Office at Kolkata, I was treating him with awe. But as we travelled together to Santiniketan, he put me at ease by treating me at par and frequently cracking good-humoured jokes at the cost of the Bengalees. Dr. Paniker had a soft corner for Kolkata and hardly ever refused any invitation either from my side or from Jadavpur University Comparative Literature Department where he had a number of friends and admirers. I have especially fond memories of our spending a few days together at Guwahati Circuit House right on the mighty Brahmaputra, on the occasion of the sixth birth centenary celebration of Sankaradeva. Professor Swapan Majumdar of Jadavpur University was also with us. Dr. Paniker enlivened the days by his dazzling wit and sharp sense of humour. He took a number of snaps of the Brahmaputra with me and Professor Majumdar in the frame. On return to Thiruvananthapuram, he sent some of these photographs with a lovely note. Later, he composed a long poem on the Brahmaputra and published it in a Malayalam magazine with one of these photographs. At my behest, he translated the poem in English and sent it to me, which I, in turn, got translated into Assamese and published in a reputed Assamese monthly along with the same photograph. Memory of his joyous smile at this turn of events still warms up my heart.

By a happy coincidence Dr. Paniker was appointed as a Trustee in the National Book Trust's Board of Trustees, during my four-year stint with the Trust. He always encouraged and guided me and would often give the wisest advice without making it sound so. Wearing his scholarship and wisdom lightly was one of his endearing qualities. I hope our readers will bear with me if I hold forth a little further on my relationship of mutual trust with Dr. Paniker. During 1988-90, Sahitya Akademi organized a few national workshops on translation with which he was closely associated, both in planning and execution. When he was entrusted with the responsibility of putting together all the papers and proceedings of these workshops, he registered my help and desired that the book so generated might be published by the Kolkata office. The Akademi authorities promptly agreed and I brought out the volume under the title *The Making of Indian Literature*.

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ity .) The book is out of print and I promised Dr. Paniker last year when he came to Delhi to deliver our Samvatsar Lecture, that we shall reprint it soon Alas, time flew and before the slightly revised volume could be brought out, he departed. I will ever cherish the memory of Dr. Paniker both as a human being and as a poet and scholar.

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In this issue we have four writers and poets reminiscing on Dt Paniker—K. Satchidanandan, Rati Saxena, Amiya Dev and Sitakant Mahapatra During the last two months, we have also lost Raja Rao, the last living member of the triumvirate of Indian English fiction, and ManoharRa SarDesai, the leading light of Konkani literature. Harish Trivedi writes on Raja Rao and Damodar Mauzo on ManoharRai SarDesai.

I have recently come across a poetry anthology entitled *Poets Against the War*. Published by Thunder's Mouth Press, New York in 2003, and edited by the leading American poet Sam Hamill, it is a landmark anthology—collection of original poetry that registered each poet's opposition to American Iraq war. Its origin can be traced back to the day when Sam Hamill received an invitation from the First Lady Laura Bush to a White House symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice". Upon opening her letter he was overcome by a sense of nausea and disgust, having only recently read George Bush's proposed "Shock and Awe" attack plan for Iraq, which called for saturation bombing. Ironically, the symposium was to be held in memory of Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson, three of the most original and anti-establishment poets in American literature.

While former Poet Laureate Rita Dove, and other reputed poets in Stanley Kunitz and Robert Bly immediately refused the invitation in protest against Bush's Iraq policy, Sam Hamill reacted slightly differently. He composed an e-mail addressed to the "Friends and Fellow Poets" in which called upon writers to "reconstitute a Poets Against the War movement in the one organized to speak out against the war in Vietnam." He asked early writer "to speak up for the conscience of our country and lend his or he name to our petition against this war" by submitting "a poem or statement of conscience to the Poets Against the War website."

The response was overwhelming. Over 13,000 poems were contributed by nearly 11,000 poets, which included unknown poets as well celebrated ones like Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, Robert Bly, Grace Schulme Carolyn Kizer, Jim Harrison, Rita Dove and others. With the assistance Sally Anderson, Hamill selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all White House on the appointed day. But once the White House got with the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting it all the selected fewer than two hundred poems from 13,000 and prepared this anthology with the intent of presenting the selected fewer the sele

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of his plans, the symposium was promptly "postponed". Mrs Bush's spokeswoman said, "While Mrs. Bush respects the right of all Americans to express their opinions, she, too, has opinions and believes it would be inappropriate to turn a literary event into a political forum." So much for "Poetry and the American Voice" at the White House!

However, the anthology was published in the midst of a huge mobilization by the poets: over 200 "poetry readings against the war" were held throughout the United States of America on February 12, 2003, the day the original White House symposium was scheduled. Poetry, its traditions, and its role in culture was discussed in news stories, on op-ed pages and in the streets as perhaps never before in the American nation's history. The voice of dissenting poets is always unwelcome to the authorities in the establishment, but it has been and will always be heard. This collection is both a cry against oppressive war and a celebration of the long and rich tradition of moral opposition and dissent by writers and artists.

Kiesen

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee Editor

Raja Rao: The Twice-Born Novelist

Harish Trivedi

Indian fiction in English is famously called the "twice-born" fiction a term often (mis) understood to mean a high-caste, privileged, Brahminical literature. If this is indeed so, then it was Raja Rao who performed for it the sacred-thread ceremony, thus conducting a ritual of shadding (purification) for this hybrid, mixed-blood off-spring of the liaison between the English language and an Indian sensibility. It was Raja Rao who gave to the theme of the East-West encounter, which Ruth Jhabvala and Anian Desai were content to explore on social, cultural or racial terms, a deeper spiritual dimension.

Raja Rao, who passed away on 8 July 2006 at Austin, Texas, 1 the age of 97, was born on 8 November 1908 in Hassan (Karnataka) After the death of his mother when he was four, he was brought up in Harihalli by his grandfather who was a Sanskrit-knowing vedantin. He went to school in Hyderabad (where his father worked) to an elite madara: and then to the Nizam College, later moving on to the Aligarh Music University where he was reportedly the only Hindu boy in his class. Next he was off on a scholarship to Montpellier and then to the Sorbonne where he researched the Indian influence on Irish literature. His education was thus a blend not only of East and West (which has since become common enough in modern India), but also, so to say, of South and North and of Hindu and Muslim. Jawaharlal Nehru was to tease Range hours. Rao about his imperfect Hindustani (presumably acquired at Aligarh) during a meeting in Science at Aligarh) a meeting in Switzerland, while the terminally ailing Kamala, whose Hinding incidentally was become incidentally was become a supplied to the incidentally was better than Jawaharlal's, kindly sought to defend and profession of the control Rao. (This occasion is recounted by Rao with gentle humor in his book of essays and sketches, The Meaning of India.)

Meanwhile, in Paris, Raja Rao had in 1931 married a French woman Camille Mouly, and encouraged and supported by her, put his Ph. I

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nch woman his Ph. D aside, and launched on his first novel in English. This was Kanthapura (1938), which appeared by coincidence at about the same time as the (1938), which appeared by Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan, who first works of fictions by Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan, who had both made their fictional debut in 1935, with *Untouchable* and *Swami and Friends*, respectively. These three novelists were to go on to constitute the Holy Trinity of Indian Fiction in English for the succeeding half-century.

Kanthapura begins with the kind of breathtaking artistic boldness

Kanthapura begins with the kind of breathtaking artistic boldness and ambition that no Indian writer of English was to match until Midnight's Children forty years later. Its short "Foreword" has been quoted so frequently in critical discussions of the Indian Novel in English that it has become, in effect, the manifesto of all Indian Writing in English. "The telling has not been easy," Raja Rao here said with fetching honesty—and then explained the nature of the creative difficulty, in terms so simple and true that they still have not been improved upon: "one has to express in a language that is not one's own emotions that are one's own." He predicted that with constant use, Indian English will emerge as a distinct if not autonomous variety, like American English or Irish English.

Kanthapura is a stirring depiction of how the Gandhian nationalist movement of 1930-31 reaches out to permeate a remote and supposedly "unchanging" village in Karnataka and to transform it radically. As a result of the impact of Gandhi Mahatma, the pariahs are no longer treated as untouchables, and even pious, illiterate grandmothers are motivated to go on a march to picket toddy-shops and to protest against the cruel injustice of "Hunter sahib," the owner of a neighbouring coffee estate. Gandhi is deified and taken by the simple villagers to be an avatar of Krishna; in fact, the first edition of the novel carried an epigraph on the title-page citing Krishna's assurance from *The Bhagavadgita*: "Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come." In recent years, the "Subaltern" historians have often denigrated Gandhi by alleging that his message was no less religious than it was political. Kanthapura offers proof positive that this was indeed so, and that this was precisely where Gandhi's irresistible and incomparable appeal lay.

In any case, it is not as if Gandhi is sentimentally and uncritically iconized in this novel. In the end, the satyagrahis have been brutally pulped into defeat, they must retreat even from their village Kanthapura to go and settle elsewhere, and their leader, the young Moorthy who was the first among them to have been fired up by the Gandhian message, now turns away from Gandhi and feels more drawn to the socialist, "equal-distributionist" Nehry

Kanthapura remains Rao's most widely read novel in India and abroad, generally and in college classrooms, mainly because its early and

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extensive treatment of Gandhian nationalism, and the stylistic experimentation through which Rao sought to give his English a Kannada-Sanskitter flavour and cadence, are both concerns that tie in aptly with the current post-colonial modes of reading literature. Indeed, Kanthapura is one of the most evocative and nuanced novels about Gandhian nationalism not only in English but in any Indian language, with only Premchand's great Gandhian epic Rangabhumi (1925) preceding and excelling it in scope and political radicalism. At the same time, the eponymous village in which Kanthapura is set is infinitely more remote than the village in which Premchand had partially set Rangabhumi, and the process of indirect patriotic filtration through which this village at the back of the beyond gets caught up in the nationalist mainstream is one of the aptest illustrations of the notion of the nation as an "imagined community," in not a negative but a positive sense.

After this debut novel, Raja Rao moved resolutely away from literature. Turning his back on France and his French wife, he returned to India to launch on a long quest for a guru who would lead him to the Truth. His quest took him to many ashramas including Gandhis Sevagram; his account of the power of Gandhi's ascetic personality including his intense silences, is rendered with a novelist's delicate suggestivity. Ultimately, Raja Rao found the guru he sought in Swami Atmanand in Thiruvananthapuram. When E. M. Forster, who had acclaimed Kanthaparas "the best novel to come out of India," visited Jaipur in 1945 to attend a writer's conference and wondered why Raja Rao was missing, Raja Rao wrote to explain: "I have abandoned literature for good and gone over to metaphysics."

Fortunately for literature, this did not quite prove to be so. In 1960, after a 22-year silence, Raja Rao returned to fiction with a novel tiled. The Serpent and the Rope — a metaphor which harks back to the great exponent of the Advaita philosophy, Sankaracharya. As an ignorant man mistakes a piece of rope to be a serpent, so he mistakes this world which is merely maya, to be the reality. This foundational Hindu world view is fleshed out in this clearly autobiographical novel through the conflict between the Indian hero Ramaswamy and his French wife Madeleins with two other Indian women playing supportive allegorical roles.

Raja Rao's next work of fiction, The Cat and Shakespeare (1965) again evokes a metaphor from Sankara recommending that one should surrender oneself totally to Providence, as a kitten does to the mother cat, which carries it around in its mouth with the most tender care. It is a gently humorous and whimsical novella set in Thiruvananthapurant and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian of Malgorian and Board Third Member, Kunni Kutta Nair, fell with a limit of the care in the same ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and both the tone and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and the locale are in some ways reminiscent of Malgorian and Malgoria

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into his courtyard, and blood came out of his nose. It was diagnosed as one thing, and he died of another." The humour is less gentle and the touch less sure, however, in Rao's other novella from this period, the touch less sure, however, in French 1965, in English 1976) in which an Comrade Kirillov (published in French 1965, in English 1976) in which an Indian Marxist rails against Gandhi and Vedanta and is in turn trenchantly satirized by the novelist.

Raja Rao had meanwhile moved to America, and from 1966 to 1980 taught at the University of Texas at Austin, where enrollment in his classes often exceeded 200. Honours and awards multiplied: the Padma Bhushan in 1969, the Neustadt prize in 1988 (the so-called pre-Nobel or alternative Nobel, also won by Marquez, Milosz and Paz but by no other Indian), the Sahitya Akademi prize in 1964 and then its Fellowship, a far rarer honour, in 1997. Meanwhile, true to pattern, Raja Rao broke another two-decade long silence to publish in 1988 his longest and most ambitious novel, The Chessmaster and his Moves, in which the chessmaster is of course God himself and his moves are the leela or play through which the cosmos is created and sustained. The jury is still out on this work, which may prove to be either his life's crowning achievement, or a tired old rehash of The Serpent and the Rope - depending on what the two still unpublished parts turn out to contain, for this last work and testament is in fact a trilogy, of which the second volume, The Daughter of the Mountain, is scheduled to be published on Rao's next birthday, 8 November 2006.

Though Raja Rao has, with Anand and Narayan, been canonized as one of the three founding fathers of the Indian Novel in English, it is doubtful whether he saw himself primarily as a novelist. The courses he taught in America were not in literature but in Indian philosophy, and he spoke of the act of writing fiction as a form of sadhana. In one of the last public speeches of his life, delivered when the fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi was conferred on him at a special ceremony in Austin, Texas, in 1997, he referred to India as a "punya-bhumi" and said: "To have been born in India and not to have written in Sanskrit, or at least in Kannada is, believe me, an acute humiliation." Such a nativist cry of the heart may sound a little embarrassing if not politically incorrect, but it does perhaps represent an act of resistance to a real cultural threat in this age of Anglophone cosmopolitanism and monolingual globalization.

Raja Rao was a deeply contemplative and charismatically attractive man — "part Hamlet and part Krishna," as the British critic Alastair Niven described him in a recent tribute! He believed in austere living and high thinking. His novels are not everyone's cup of tea, and some readers have found him affected, pretentious and exasperating. But he had a sense of comic enjoyment — of rasa and leela, in his own favoured

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terms — and like a true creative writer (or even a true seeker of the Truth), he spoke not of certainty of belief but of constant search and doubt and conflict. The clearly autobiographical hero of *The Serpent and the Rope* says in the very opening sentence of the novel: "I was born a Brahmin—that is, devoted to Truth and all that." As the wry tone indicates, high metaphysical Truth in Raja Rao came always wrapped up in plenty of fictional and imaginative "all that," and that is what makes for the rich humanity of his work.

With the passing away within the last few years of Mulk Raj Anand R. K. Narayan and now Raja Rao, each in their nineties, an era of Indian writing in English comes to an end. Like the Trimurti, each of them faced in a different direction: Anand with his explicit political radicalism. Narayan with his gentle comedy and tolerance, Raja Rao with his spiritual consciousness and questing. While they were great contemporaries who were often bracketed together and mentioned in the same breath, they could not have been more different temperamentally even if they had tried to be.

As with the Triveni at the sangam in Allahabad, Narayan in his vision was the vast and serene Ganga, Anand the darker and more turbulent Yamuna, and Raja Rao the invisible but subterranean (antahsalila) Saraswaii best seen through the eye of faith. In their style and idiom too, Narayan wrote English as if it was unself-consciously and unproblematically his own language, Anand rode this foreign beast roughshod, prodding it along with the earthy exhortations of four-letter words in Panjabi, while Raja Rao sought harmoniously to domesticate English under the same roof as Kannada as if they were co-wives. Towards the end of their lives, all these three writers were somewhat eclipsed in these market-driven "liberalized" times by a younger generation of Indian novelists in English, but that does not take away from the fact that they were the brave pioneers of the genre at a time when many thought it lacked credibility and viability. Anand, Narayan and Rao (or as I sometimes think of them as one composite triad, named Anand Narayan Rao) each became a classic in their own life-times, and now that all three are gone, we are left with mere contemporaries.

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Remembering Ayyappa Paniker

K. Satchidanandan

In the demise of K.Ayyappa Paniker Indian literature has lost one of lits eloquent exponents and radical innovators. An avant-garde poet, an insightful critic, a profound scholar, a responsible translator, a careful editor, a rare teacher—Paniker's genius had diverse moods and hues. And he left his glow on everything he touched. He was to Malayalam what Gopal Krishna Adiga was to Kannada, Mardhekar to Marathi, Muktibodh to Hindi, Navkant Barua to Asomiya, Bishnu Dey to Bangla or Sachi Routray to Oriya or Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Urdu: all of them heralded a revolution in sensibility in their languages and marked a transition in the history of their literatures with their poems, translations and critical interventions. They also groomed a new generation of writers in their languages who would, even by denying them, carry forward the task that had engaged their whole life, of innovation in perspective and idiom.

Ayyappa Paniker was not just a poet; he was a literary personality who created his own age in literature by working in several genres and media and that is how I had known him even before I met him in 1966. I had already read many of Paniker's early poems like "The Love Song of a Surrealist", "Kurukshetram", "He", "Gagarin", "Agnipooja" and "Pururavas" and been impressed by their unconventional modes of conception as well as articulation. I was a post-graduate student of English literature at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam and had just begun to take writing seriously at that time; a few of my poems and articles had appeared in little magazines like Sameeksha and Anveshanam. I still vividly recall that meeting. He had already read all that I wrote and commented on the novelty and power of the images in my poems. He had come on some in a conference room in a hotel near the college. That was the time

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when the New Poetry was being hotly debated in Malayalam. Its detractors found fault with its new rhythms, use of blank verse and prose, obscure images and novel syntax while the admirers found it refreshing after the tyranny of the stale, cliché-ridden poetry of the imitators of great romantics like Changampuzha Krishna Pillai. Paniker was the very embodiment of all that was new in thinking as well as poetry at that time and had already inspired many younger poets like Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, Madhavan Ayyappath, N. N. Kakkad, M. N. Paloor, Cheriyan K. Cheriyan, T. R. Sreenivas and several others including me. That informal evening meet had only the supporters of the New-like the fiction writer Ponjikkan Raphy, the author of Swargadootan, the first stream-of-consciousness novel in Malayalam—M. Thomas Mathew, a critic of note and T. Ramachandran who later went on to become a major writer of New Fiction under the pen name, T.R. We discussed the state of contemporary poetry and the need for a journal to give an impetus to the whole Movement and then Paniker read out, in his characteristic style in his gentle voice, his new poem, "Mrityupooja" (Hymn to Death). I did like the poem and the cadence of its dandaka metre used in the Kathakali verse, but I, the kind of confused existential Leftist that I was then, had ideological reservations about its mood of total hopelessness, a reservation I did not hide from the poet. To my great surprise I found that when the poem was published in Mathrubhumi weekly, it ended with a kind of apology for Ravana's dance of death and the hope that Sita will be retrieved from the netherworld of darkness: in its earlier version, it had ended repeating the initial invitation to death. I felt so happy to assume that perhaps my criticism had something to do with this change in the published version.

That was the beginning of an intimate relationship that went on acquiring new depths until his painful final parting on 23 August. In 1967, we—twenty poets and critics—together launched Kerala Kavita, a poet quarterly that became the mouthpiece of the new movement. Not that it did not publish good conventional poetry; only its emphasis was on New Poetry. It encouraged all of us to experiment, translate and share our thoughts about poetry with the readers. Each issue had, besides poems in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayal in Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Malayalam, translations of bunches of poems by one non-Ma

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from Indonesia, Eugenio Montale from Italy, Zbignew Herbert from from Indon Poland, and Jibanananda Das from Bengal and writing studies of poetry and evaluating the new trends in poetry from time to time. The readers may well imagine how crucial this kind of a rigorous training must have been to a poet in his early twenties. Mine was no isolated case; Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan translated Octavio Paz's masterpiece, The Sunstone, the poems of Senghor from Senegal and Cesar Vallejo from Peru for the quarterly of Seng. So Beckett's path-breaking play, Waiting for Godot; Attoor Ravivarma did Voznesensky and Madhavan Ayyappath did Gopala Krishna Adiga. There were issues focusing on the New Kannada Poetry and Tamil Poetry too. Paniker himself translated T. S. Eliot (including his "The Wasteland") Nicolas Guillen and Pablo Neruda. Poets and readers of poetry looked forward to the meetings to release each issue of Kerala Kavita held in different towns including Chennai and Bangalore as they always had exciting poets' meets with a lot of new voices and stimulating discussions of poetry around papers most of which were written, embarrasingly, by me on Paniker's insistence. My first collection of essays on poetry, Kurukshetram, contained mostly articles published in Kerala Kavita including studies of three of Paniker's own poems, "Kurukshetram", "Pururavas" and "Mrityupooja" (later I wrote one on his "Pakalukal, Ratrikal" (Days, Nights) and also general evaluations of his poetry in Malayalam and English, the latter for Jayanta Mahapatra's publication, Chandrabhaga. Many of the poems in my first collection, Anchusooryan (Five Suns) also had poems published in the same quarterly including the title poem that had appeared in the very first issue. Paniker continued to edit Kerala Kavita until he passed away, though its second incarnation, as an annual, did not have the same impact as the quarterly, not for any decline in quality; it had survived its original mission as the herald of New Poetry in the language. Still it continued publishing the youngest of writers and translations from around the world. The last translations I did for Kerala Kavita last year were of poetry from North-East India. One of Paniker's last wishes, expressed to its publisher M. M. Basheer, was that Kerala Kavita may not stop publication even after he was gone: what else can prove better

the great commitment he had to the cause it stood for?

Paniker had his own ways of creating and looking at poetry, but he never imposed them on younger poets like us. At least from the Seventies of the last century onwards I have been writing a very different kind of poetry though it did share his inclination for stylistic innovation and his sense of irony. In fact it was Paniker himself who published my of faith, mine as well as that of my generation and marked a turning

point in my poetry as also in the New Poetry in Malayalam after the change heralded by Paniker. By that time all of us younger poets had begun to create our own modernisms that often disagreed with Paniker's modes and mores. I even wrote an article criticising Paniker's seemingh apolitical stance. But he continued to treat me with great affection and respected our difference, a quality one seldom finds in senior poets most of whom want younger writers to be their perpetual disciples and mimics Later however I have come to feel that Paniker was political in his own way. He ridiculed the ways of the world, exposed hypocrisy of every kind and reacted to a crisis like the Emergency with a series of caustic cartoon-poems; only he refused to be bound by any definite ideology that he knew would circumscribe his poetry. He continued to encourage me unobtrusively, without ever making me feel he was 'patronising' me It was he who introduced me to great Indian poets and world poets of note through the Poetry Festivals organised by Bharat Bhavan and ICCR and recommended me to the Sahitya Akademi to join the team of Indian poets participating in the Festival of India in the now-extinct Soviet Union, which was my second trip abroad, the first being to Yugoslavia to take part in the Sarajevo Poetry Days on the recommendation of someone I never knew—the Hindi poet Sreekant Verma who had read me only in translations. I translated some of Paniker's poetry into English on my own that he liked immensely and encouraged me to b more translations - not only of his poetry - into English. That gave me enough confidence to translate a lot of Malayalam poetry into English for various occasions. He was also responsible for my joining the Sahiya Akademi as the Editor of Indian Literature. I was extremely reluctant 10 leave Kerala where I had my home and friends and readers; but for his sweet persuasion I would never have moved to Delhi. It was a decision that changed my life: I am not speaking of the various recognitions my work received in the capital, but the new dimensions it gave to my life. experience, the new orientations it gave to my literary enquiries and knowledge and the new directions it gave to my writing in general and poetry in particular. He never refused my invitations to Delhi, for poetry readings as well as talks. He was also a regular contributor to India. Literature. He readily agreed to edit the revised edition of the Engelope of Indian Literature. of Indian Literature on my request, and also to deliver the Samvatsar Lecture at the Sahitya Akademi last February that unfortunately was his last major public programme. He had had a long association with the Akademia having been on its Boards and also edited for it a collection of Indian poetry in English and the marvellous 4-volume anthology of Medical Indian Literature.

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of Indian Medieral The last time I met him was about a month before his demise at his house in Trivandrum. I gave him my Collected Poetry in three volumes that had just come out and asked about his well-being. He knew by then he did not have much time left—he had begun, very unusually for him, to speak about the impending death even a few months before when the first symptoms of his lung malfunction had appeared. He held my hands tight and thanked me for having been with him through thick and thin: this was so uncharacteristic of Paniker who abhorred all show of sentiment that I could no more stand in front of him, looking at that weak frame.

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This is not the time to attempt an evaluation of Ayyappa Paniker's contribution to literature. As a poet Paniker was the very embodiment of the spirit of Modernism in Malayalam. His "Kurukshetram" (1960) was the scream of a mind torn by the contradictions of our time. Arjuna here is not the character in Mahabharata who is assuaged and goaded into battle by the eloquence of Krishna, but the lonely, inconsolable human being who inherits the central dilemmas of his age-of hubris and of the hatred, violence, poverty, estrangement from nature and the war that it breeds. He does not trust the truths of religion or ideology any more as both have led to senseless bloodshed. He finds that the bodhi and the cross are redundant if only we will just become human and rise on our own navels. "Kurukshetram" was a break-through in terms of form and structure too. The poet mixed metres, took freedoms with them, coined new expressions and created fresh, often sur-real, images like the ripe corpses waiting to wake up in cradles. The poem had also a sprinkling of black humour and irony like when the poet asks, do the world-banks hold the key to truth, or, who will cook and serve the new Veda, does it need to be fried with mustard? "Kurukshetram" fascinated the readres of my generation who were waiting for something new, free from the cliches of romantic poetry while it angered the champions of the status quo who rejected it as unpoetic gibberish. The poet-editor of the famous Mathrubhumi Weekly returned the manuscript to the naughty youngster and it was then picked up by C. N. Sreekantan Nair, a modern playwright who at that time used to edit the weekly

"Kurukshetram" was followed by many others, each different from

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the other. "Mrityupooja" (The Hymn to Death) "Kudumba-puranam" (The Family Saga), "Pakalukal, Rathrikal" (Days, Nights) "Passage (The Family Saga), "Varida Laevitam" (II) America", "Gopikadandakam", "Ivide Jeevitam" (Here, Life) and "Gotrayanam" are perhaps his most outstanding works. In the long poen "Gotrayanam" Paniker returns to his racial roots and recreates history in the form of a journey while "Days, Nights" and "The Passage" America" are sequence poems that deal with the many contradictions of life in the U.S. where, at Indiana, Paniker had spent some years pursuing his postdoctoral research. "Kudumbapuranam" deals, with his characteristic irony, with the history of his own family in Kuttanad in Kerala. "Ivide Jeevitam" (Here, Life) is a gathering of his experiences during his tout to Russia and East Europe in a sequence of poems, one of his favourite forms, used in all his travel poems. His dark satires during the year of the Emergency in India revealed the conscientious objector in Panker while his sarcastic poems on power and corruption as well as his series of 'Cartoon Poems' and 'The Tales of the Maharajah' used irony as a weapon to fight evil and as a new tool to comprehend the tragi-comic human condition. He went on renewing himself all through his poets career that resulted in the astounding formal variety of his poetry. He tried Sanskrit metres, the metre of the kathakali verse and of the verse, various Dravidian metres, free verse patterns and prose of different kinds and tones. The range of his verbal resources and cultural registers was equally astounding. He liberated the art of poetry from its orthodox confines giving the posterity a range of formal possibilities and plent of experimental space.

While editing Kerala Kavita Paniker also kept writing and translating and editing many series of books. The four volumes of Medieval India Literature he edited for the Sahitya Akademi is an exemplary collection while he also edited the Complete Works of Shakespeare and a series of 120 world classics in Malayalam translation. He was nominating editor for Katha, Delhi and consulting editor for The Journal of South Asian Literalize Michigan (of which two issues were entirely devoted to Malayalam writing besides many other literary publications. Paniker also edited a series of monographs in English on the English Writers of Kerala. His books of Thalsarki Size Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai, V.K. Krishna Menon, Vallathol and Sardar K.M. Paniker, his short works like A Short History of Malayalam Literature, International Conference and Live Teachers Renaissance and Indian English Literature, his literary articles collected in the volumes, his books on Indian poetics, especially the one on the principle of antassannings and the principle of antassanning antassanning and the principle of antassanning and the principle of antassanning and the principle of antassanning antassanning antassanning antassanning antassanning and antassanning a of antassannivesam that Paniker distinguishes from intertextuality all the are monuments to him are monuments to his stupendous scholarship and profound grasp of the different traditions of the the different traditions of literature and poetics. His collections of poetics.

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in English translation, The Poems of Ayyappa Paniker, Days, Nights and I Can't Help Blossoming that bring together poems selected from his four volumes in Malayalam besides the last published collection, Pathumanippookkal, are a good introduction to his poetry for the non-Malayali readers. His students remember him as a committed teacher and a wonderful communicator, always abreast of the developments in world literature and literary theory. His translations of the poems of Mayakovsky, poems from Cuba, Raja Rao's Cat and Shakespeare and Jean Toomer's Sugarcane are great examples of translation of poetry and prose. Ayyappa Paniker was also an excellent speaker, clear-headed, cogent in his arguments, lyrical in his expressiveness and always witty and original in his insights into authors, texts and issues. He was also interested in theatre, both classical and modern and was an inspiration behind Margi, an organisation to promote kathakali and classical arts. He also encouraged New Drama in Malayalam, especially its pioneers like G. Sankara Pillai and Kavalam Narayana Paniker and was a chief force behind the Nataka Kalari a modern theatre workshop -- established by C.N. Sreekantan Nair, another major playwright. He wrote articles not only about poetry, but on fiction, theatre, cinema, acting and aesthetics too, many of which are yet to be collected. This is also true about his essays in English still lying scattered in various journals across the world.

Paniker never went after awards and recognitions, yet he won most of the major Indian awards for literature, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, Bhilwara Award from the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, Gangadhar Meher Award, Kabir Samman and Saraswati Samman, not to speak of the many poetry awards he won in Kerala. He accepted them with humility, the sole exception being the Vayalar Award, the most popular award for literature in Kerala which he refused, probably as it came to him too late. He was never tempted by power of any kind and politely refused an invitation to be the vice-chancellor of a university in Kerala. His works have been translated into all the major languages of India besides several forein languages like French and Spanish.

Ayyappa Paniker was one of India's best cultural ambassadors to the world outside as he knew not only the new, but the classical as well. He was all for the modern, but had deep appreciation for tradition, especially its elements that would inspire new invention in art and literature. With his loss, India has lost a unique genius, an integrated human being equally at home and equally creative in diverse fields of art and knowledge.

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Ayyappa Paniker

Amiya Dev

Ayyappa Paniker was my friend. I had known him for a long time. He lived in Thiruvananthapuram and I in Kolkata, so it was no everyday that we met. But we met quite often, either in his hometown or in mine, or elsewhere at academic or literary meetings. The last I me him was a year and a half ago in Delhi when he was giving the Akademis Samvatsar Lecture. He was looking very frail. But he had not lost is inimitable sense of humour: we exchanged one or two pleasantiies la fact that was quite customary, he would be very crisp and I rather we I once wrote an over-critical-review of one of his books, he responded by sending me an essay of his complementing my views. Then when I Can't Help Blossoming came out, where he had put together the English translations of some of his recent poems, mostly by his own hand, be sent me a copy. He also sent me a copy of - in fact two copies, in he could not remember if he had sent me one - Au-delà de la mit containing a number of his poems in French translation done by direct hands—'avec l'amour', he had inscribed. I was touched, for he had hopd that I would relish the French. But I did relish the English of ICal Help Blossoming, and I was invited to contribute to a book of essays him. Was I being given a second chance to bury my righteousness and respond to his humour? I should have asked him. But these past year he was not going out of Kerala much. When at the Kolkata Book Fig. 2005. Live II of 2005, Utpalkumar Basu's Bangla translation of his award-winning of poems was brought out by the Akademi, he could not keep his more to be there. Yet Kall to be there. Yet Kolkata was one of his favourite places and he would normally miss an open normally miss an opportunity to be there. If one had a chance to him why he couldn't him why he couldn't come, he might have said with a twinkle in the court was there. eye, but I was there, wasn't I, for he had been there so many and also written that for he and also written that fascinating poem "Kolkata-Thiruvananthaputan

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Only once before to my knowledge he had not come at the last minute and sent a cable instead saying he was "Going to Cuba".

But that was a different story. The invitation had been to a comparative literature seminar at Jadavpur University. Indeed there was a time when the Jadavpur department could not think of doing a seminar without Ayyappa Paniker in it, and not just a seminar or a conference, the departmental journal too could not often do without his contribution. Some of the department's alumni would recall his lectures during a visiting assignment. Besides, whenever invited he would help its faculty selection. All this was not simply because he had been a close friend of Naresh Guha's who had been steering the department after Buddhadeva Bose, the founder, but also because he was himself a votary of comparative literature. If it were not for him then the comparative literature centre would not have materialized at the University of Kerala, seemingly as an extension of its English Institute but with a good deal of Indian literary agenda on the table. Again, if it were not for his constant support, then K.M. George might not have been able to compile his two-volume Comparative Indian Literature under the auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi. He gave encouragement to the first Indian association of comparative literature and for a while thought of a Dravidian wing as well. His Spotlight on Comparative Literature is part witness to his dedication to the discipline. When a few years ago the Kerala University Centre hosted the national congress he was its principal adviser. But ill health kept him away from the recent conference at Kottayam hosted by the School of Letters of Mahatma Gandhi University, so dear to his sense of eclecticism kremember every time I met K. Satchidanandan since that Samvatsar Lecture. I enquired about Ayyappa Paniker's health. Was he confined home. Was he not going out at all?

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Set to writing these words, memories come rushing. He and I are riding a taxi, paid for by him, to a small village by the sea outside Thiruvananthapuram to meet V.I. Subramanian, the linguist who had set up an institute to answer his ideals of language studies; and on our way back he is talking of antahsannivesa, his newly thought-up critical method. We are watching part of a Kathakali performance by Thiruvananthapuram's Margi and later visiting their dressing room taking a look at the masks. I am staying at Trivandrum Hotel during a visiting assignment to his Institute of English and he takes me to the elderly K.C. Pillai who owns the hotel but who is all steeped in Rabindranath. He introduces me to one of his successors, poet Vinayachandran, saying how good and yet how different he is. We are talking to Habib Mohammad, his one-time classmate and now University of Kerala's vice-chancellor, whose passion

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is reading modern classics of fiction. A seminar is in progress at the speakers and university senate hall where he is one of the speakers and so are eminent Malayalam writers like S. Guptan Nair and Sukumar Azhikode, whom I come to meet through him. Another seminar at the same venue scintillating with Malayalam literary skirmishes, and yet another at Calicut where he helps develop an academic interest in comparative literature. I am ringing his bell at 'Sarovaram', his house at 111 Gandhi Nagar, Thiruvananthapuran 695014 (his letters have so consistently carried his address that it has stuck to my mind) and he opens, ready to take me later to a neighbourhood restaurant for dinner. Many other memories including my escorting him to Naresh Guha's the last time or one of the last times he was in Kolkata and much earlier, his getting me indirectly involved a couple of times for the Asan Memorial Prize nomination and in getting a book out on him where he wanted to put Sankha Ghosh's piece on Kumaran Asan in English translation, done at my request by Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta How could I forget that it was he who had directed me to the Ravi Varma collection at the Thiruvananthapuram Art Institute? Indeed it was he who had introduced me to Kerala. If I mention Thakazhi's Kajar now in any connection, I owe it to him, for it was he who some two decades ago spoke on this late novel of the master at a seminar at Dhvanyaloka.

C.D. Narasimhaiah's Dhvanyaloka was a place where I used to hear Ayyappa often. CDN had that rare quality of getting companionable minds together concerned with Indian literature and arts. Ayyappa was a regular speaker there coinciding with my novitiate. His exposition on the semiotics of Kathakali still flashes through my mind, no less than the words he said introducing a Kudiyattam performance as part of the Narrative seminar at the Akademi a decade and a half ago. He had a deep voice, but when it came to reading out poetry, it took on a trill giving at the same time a sense of his craft. Listening to him was a regular treat. He had warmth that knew when to call it a day and retire—there was no touch of gregariousness about him. Death hasn't robbed me of his image and I can visualize him in a group at Dibrugath 1992 with Sisir Kumar Das, Indranath Chaudhuri, Swapan Majumda, Chandra Mohan and myself, as Nagen Saikia's guests, where he was probably the most laconic though not lacking in gestures that had a semiotic of their of their own. He was my fellow Indiana University alumnus, but he never forced that on me, and if I tried to do that he would remind me that Sitanshu (Yashaschandra) too had been there. Recently we had exchanged a few a mail. exchanged a few e-mails – he had a query, for instance, about something from Bangla and I from Bangla and I answered to the best of my knowledge - but his

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remind we had omething but his were usually brief though mine I suppose were a bit effusive. Come to think of it, his letters too over the years were never very long, in fact quite short, often postcards. When I heard from P.P. Raveendran that Ayyappa had been put under intensive care, I sent a mail to our common friend Anantha Murthy who wrote back wondering why this should happen to Ayyappa who unlike some of us had never done any excesses.

At the Kottayam conference earlier this year to which he could not come, I read out the English translation of a poem of his to give an instance of how an aspect of globalization had been treated by him. This was no news to the Malayalis in my audience, but this was perhaps an indirect tribute to one of their living poets from a non-Malayali. That poet is dead today. I mourn his death.



Ayyappa Paniker Singing on the Shores of Twilight

Sitakant Mahapatra

Dear Ayyappa,

The morning media brought the sad news that you were no more with us. Malayalam literature and Indian literature had lost a towering figure. I had lost a friend. You had finally left Sarovaram, III Gandhinagu, Thiruvananthapuram. With pride you once narrated how you built that house where my wife and I had savoured home-made idli, dosha and coffee, talking to Mrs. Paniker and your daughter Meera. From Meen I could know about the few hours before your final departure. In the death of friends, we die a little. For me it was quite a bit more

My mind travelled back to the autumn 1975 when you joined me in the flight at Bombay on a month-long sojourn to Struga poetry festive in Macedonia and then to Romania and Soviet Union. That was the first time I saw you in person. Before that it was only letters or a voice on the telephone. It was difficult to be convinced that both had ended I went back to your last letter, recalled our last conversation, opened the pages of Selected Poems, Days, Nights and I Cannot Help Blossoming with the perceptive introductions of Jayanta Mahapatra and K. Satchidanandan In my album, I looked at our pictures with K.V. Puttappa at Mysor and both of us being received at Struga in 1975. Both of us naturally look younger, your smile on the clean-shaven face infectious. Long after you decided to grow a beard. You enjoyed my joke that this new and was another step towards sainthood.

In Jayanta's words 'the truth of the poems lay on my table'. Did you have your shy wife and beloved daughter in mind when you wrong these four lines? these four lines?

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In the end, bereft of me, alone you wait on the terrace of your new house, for the lights of the watching the bright glow of the moon fade away, seeing the night's darkness blacken the earth and sky.

I recalled the many places we had been together. Our talking in soft voices not to disturb the eerie silence of lush-green Thekkady, looking at sun-sets at Kovalam, Kanyakumari, lake Okhrid at Struga and lake Baikal. The fabulous yellow-red sky of Siberia hang over the exotic city Irkutsk on the Baikal. Once when you had asked me if I intended visiting Sabarimala, I had quipped that for me Thiruvananthapuram's Lord Ayyappa was good enough. With that your gentle, mysterious, and affectionate smile played on your face for a while. You said you too would not dare visiting it as you were too feminine! At Thiruvananthapuram you took me to a Kathakali rehearsal session to talk to the artists as their faces were being painted. Together we visited city temples and our dear common friend Aravindan, the maker of Pokkuveyil, (to me the poet of Indian cinema) and the house of poet Vishnu Narayanan Namboodiri.

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The Eastern Europe visit enabled us to be together for four long (and short!) weeks. We had enough time to interact with the poets and writers like Ivan Lalic, Vasko Popa, Yugoslav Poets at Belgrade, the Romanian Poet Aurel Covaci at Bucharest, Rima Kazakova, Akhmadulina and others at Moscow and Leningrad. Every evening after the group discussion with them we used to discuss them individually with each other. I saw how different was our food habits as we courageously faced various kinds of food, some of them exotic. A vegetarian with simple food habits, I could see you missed dosa, idli, sambar, chatni and lemon-rice. Your dress was always simple and informal except when the occasion was formal. The suitcase you carried was small and the contents sparse. When we returned the only weight added was of the books presented

I recall in particular one incident during our visit. We were on a short flight over a mountainous terrain from Tbilisi, Georgia's capital to Erevan, capital of Azerbaijan. Half way it encountered dense clouds, thunder and lightning. The aircraft shook like a tiny leaf in a storm. The cries of kids only heightened the panic of the adults. Holding tight the hand-rests of our seats, we looked at each other. I said "Ayyappa, let of keeping to meet our Lord." You held my hand tight in a gesture of keeping up my spirits. Perhaps the Lord was not yet ready to receive us! We reached Erevan safe but shaken. I had never faced that kind of highest of turbulence in my life till that date. I hope never again I should have

Sitakant Mahapatra / 25

that experience. Confessing a similar traumatic feeling you added "Panike who never panics, really panics this time." You were very fond of the pun.

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I vividly recall two other events during our visit. One, the extremely tiring long flight over Siberia from Pyatigorsk in the Caucasus to Irkutsk on lake Baikal with two stopovers at Omsk and Cheliabinsk. The aircraft was fairly small with no service of food and its windows were permanently closed preventing any sighting of the outside world. Later, we were told they had to keep the cost low cutting out facilities as people with low incomes had to travel by air because of the enormous distances. The other thing I remember was our visit to the Dostoevsky and Pushkin museums at Leningrad which was also the city of Akhmatova. Back in our hotel we read her poems late into the night. So too was our visit to Lermontov's Memorial at Pyatigorsk and the site where he had fought his fatal sword fight, like Pushkin.

I had known you as a prominent poet, a formidable scholar of literature, a Fulbright scholar, a teacher, a critic, a translator, a popular figure in seminars and one in love with Kerala's cultural heritage and sad about many contemporaneous developments. The month-long travelling together enabled me an opportunity to see the man behind the poet and scholar. I saw how you laughed, joked, enjoyed jokes, missed your wife and children back home. I remember how we relished the Ukranian kharbhuj (water melon). I saw how and when you got angrisad and morose. I shared your happiness at the news of Kerala Sahiya Akademi Award for Ayyappa Panikerude Kruthikal.

I had known you as a poet friend who was the first to translate me into Malayalam. You translated my three long-poems on Jara, Kubi and Yashoda and asked for the originals in Devnagari script which you did into Malayalam and published them together on facing pages in Kerli Sahitya Akademi's journal Sahityalokam. Later, you translated and edited (with poet Vinaychandran, K. A. Paniker, and Dr. P. Ramchandran Yasodayute Paattu. We enjoyed Agzibekov using the word Kaputa with the gesture of cutting his own throat when he could not arrange boating for us in lake Baikal. The word stuck to us forever to be repeated whenever we met or spoke on telephone. There were occasions when we differed on our assessment of the writers we met and the Soviet view of at literature and culture. I recall in particular how we debated re-reading Dostoevsky by Y. Karyakin. We saw the intimate details of Dostoevsky life, the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to when he was a prisoner in Leningrad. The novelist use to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chains and the metal bowl in which food was served to smoke a life of the chain and the chain and the chain and the

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when he worked at his table. The museum authorities had preserved a hand-written note quietly put on the table with the advice "Father you should not smoke so much." That evening we discussed how much we agreed with Dostoevsky's saying "I am not good at singing lullabies, though I have tried that too." The travel enabled me to see you as a person, soft-spoken, quiet, friendly, satirical and who enjoyed my leg-pullings!

For me a place is always a person. You said how the places we visited were growing within you and perhaps would become poems. They did and there were poems titled Beograd "(Belgrade)", "Struga", "Skopje", "Bucuresti" (Bucharest), "Iasi" (Jash), "Constantza and Moskva" (Moscow) forming a section Here Life in your Selected Poems which I received immediately on its publication, with a letter "fondly remembering our days in those places."

II

You dedicated yourself to poetry and literature stretching over five decades. As one of the pioneers in modern Malayalam poetry you created a new idiom and a new sensibility. In your poetry one can see both serious and mocking tones often with a sense of humour behind which lurked a tragic feeling. Irony came to you almost naturally. I admired one of your early works "Kurukshetram". I agree with Satchidanandan that 'the two American sequences—"Days, Nights" (1970) and "Passage to America" (1972) reveal fully the possibilities and the limitations of Paniker's poetry his pre-occupation with love, death and the futility of life, his aversion to politics, war and urbanity, his black humour, his frail passions of lust.' You are deservedly held in high esteem as a poet and a path-finder in modern Malayalam poetry. You fashioned a new poetics and a new tradition combining commitment and aestheticism. Now you have become a part of Malayalam's long poetic tradition. As a teacher and critic you had acquired a high reputation. Your critical works are perceptive and often break new ground. Your Gopinath Mohanty Memorial lecture, titled "Gopinath Mohanty and Indian Narrative Tradition" was hugely admired. Once three of us—yourself, myself and the Russian professor Vasiliev, at that time in the Institute of English—debated certain theoretical aspects of modern poetry and it was easy to see the vast range and depth of your knowledge of literary issues and your sharp ability for analysis. As a translator your conscientious approach to the task was enviable. I had an early acquaintance with it when, as earlier mentioned, you translated

Sitakant Mahapatra / 27

my own poetry. As an editor, you have done a lot, prominent among them being the admirable works on Medieval Indian Literature and, of course many other anthologies. You spoke of your regret of not being able to keep alive your pet literary journal Kerala Kavita edited by you You had been on visiting fellowships in several American Universities I recall your letters from those places, in particular the one on your meeting with poet Robert Bly for whom I have great admiration.

For disap

There have been many critical accounts on your poetry and lan sure there will be many more as the years roll on. Both your elders your contemporaries, those coming after you, the most distinguished including poets of the younger generation, held you in high esteem even when some of them followed a different track in their themes and styles That is perhaps as it should be, for poets and writers respect their tradition but differ from it and challenge it.

Several Literary awards and Sammans came to you over the years, and it is a long list including Padmashree, the latest being Saraswati Samman You would not be there to receive it in person.

In your poetry, you tried to combine the dialectics of acceptance and denial, the sublime and the ridiculous, holiness and vulgarity. You wanted the poems to convey the feeling of mind and thought, both being a mode of restlessness in their search for meaning. By the time this vain task ends, life ends too'. In our one month's journey abroad you spoke about "Kurukshetram" and what went into its making. The long poem happens to be also one of your long poems I liked Satchidanandan in his "Ayyappa Paniker's Poetry: An Afterword" writes "He listens to the screams of Macedonia and brings together the anguished Abraham offering Issac to his God and Bhagat Singh, crowned with vines and veins." Satchidanandan adds how you once bought a bund of flowers from a lame flower-girl with "wintered legs" and "autumn! eyes" and offered it back to her as a present. It is symbolic of the life we "consecrate with love-chants" upon our earth "crumbling don't all around us in spite of the transparent net of supporting dreams." happened to be a witness to this purchase of flowers from the little lame flower girl at a street corner as both of us were returning from an open air restaurant at Bucharest to our hotel nearby.

We poets often have the misfortune of seeing our dreams being led and court have the misfortune of seeing our dreams trampled and mutilated. But we remain determined to celebrate life, many hopes and dreams. You were fond of Greece and I feel it spoke to you a lot. When you are you a lot. When you spoke of Zorba of Kazantzakis, I saw your immediately liking for the characters. liking for the character and its author. I have the same feeling. Then put wrote: wrote:

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To be spent on reflections over past sorrows, Please, go on playing nonstop on the santoori, Until the dawn arrives that brings joy, Until Zorba sings on the shores of twilight.

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For the Zorba of Thiruvananthapuram the shores of twilight have disappeared into the darkness of night.



Sitakant Mahapatra / 29

Everything is in the Past Tense Now

Rati Saxena

That day, when I went to see Ayyappa Paniker along with Pradeep before leaving for Ladakh, on the 18th of June of this year, he looked totally distressed as he said-ellam poi (Every thing has gone) "now there is only past tense." He looked pale, thin and tired. I was stunned as I was not aware of his poor condition. He was saying, "I have lived so much, I have done what I could do, now why should I worry, let death come." He was consoling himself as we sat quietly not knowing how to console him.

"I have no problem, I need a little oxygen to live, and you know I have written about oxygen in my poems. Now I am facing the same problem." He was still consoling himself. Light and shadows were passing through his face one after another; still his few gestures were sharp and dominant as before. After a few moments he gained his own old humorous mood and asked Pradeep, "So you people are going to the Himalayas are you planning to meet Shiva on Kailash? You can communicate through satellite." Pradeep replied back as usual, "Yes, we would certainly like to meet him, if he likes to meet us." While we were getting ready to go he again fell into depression. He said to Pradeep. "I am lucky that you people came from far off places and became my friends. Please bless me, before going on your Yatra; (was he thinking about his Yatra) I doubt now). Pradeep quietly put his hands on Dr. Paniker's head, and then took his hands in his own.... He turned to me and asked D I look like my own ghost?" I replied, "No, you are very much the same Ayyappa Paniker. I touched his feet and sought his blessings for the year celebration of Kritya which was supposed to be held in Jammu web journal was supposed to be held in Jammu web journal—www.kritya.in) he blessed me—"ellam nannavum (every think will be great). will be great); you are going to achieve a lot in future." If some body claims to know Ayyappa Paniker, then he is certainly

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mistaken, as knowing Ayyappa Paniker is impossible, such a complex personality that he was. I had always felt that he was five feet above the earth and ten feet below, still I say that I know him for more than 12 years. Those days when I was working with Kerala Hindi Prachar Sabha, I happened to meet Muneendra ji of Kalpna (Hyderabad) in a meeting. He told me, "Rati ji you must bring Malayalam literature into Hindi through translation, otherwise how can you return the debt you owe this land where you are living for long?" Thus the idea of translation dawned in my mind. After some time I got a letter from Bhasha, a journal from Delhi to send them a Malayalam poem of a contemporary poet. I asked Balakrishna Pillai of Hindi Prachar Sabha regarding this. As per his instructions I went to see Ayyappa Paniker who had his office near Hindi Prachar Sabha. I was seated in the waiting room and after some time a short man with gray beard came down the steps. His broad smile and big teeth were in contrast to his sad deep eyes; he did not look like a poet to me until he spoke. When I asked for a poem to translate, he asked me-"Can you read Malayalam?"

"Not very well, sir!" I replied honestly.

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He smiled and went up again and brought a small book of poetry. While giving this book he asked me to see the poem "Kannamma". I thanked him and came back. I translated that poem with the help of others.

Then a time came in my life, when I was too disappointed with the dirty politics in Kerala Hindi Prachar Sabha. I was sad and lonely. In that mood I opened the book given by Ayyappa Paniker and tried to read some of his poems. The title of the first poem was "Kurukshetram" which attracted me because of the state of my mind then. To release my tension I started reading and translating that poem. By the time I completed the poem, I had become a fan of the poet. "Kurukshetram" was the poem which had changed the direction of Malayalam poetry and a whole generation of poets got inspired by this poem. Even though I had accidentally read it, I too became an admirer of the poem in the end. A few months later, Ayyappa Paniker phoned me and asked he "can you translate a few stories of a Malayalam writer?" I agreed happily and went to his office and he gave me Chandramati's stories. When I went to give him the translations of those stories, he gave me five poems of his own—"Video Death" and others (these poems got published in journals like Vagarth, Samakaleen Sahitya etc and attracted

I could not digest those poems at first, may be because of my

Rati Saxena / 31

immaturity; but when I handed over the translations, he asked me for the first time—"How do you like Kerala?"

"I used to like Kerala, while I was staying at home, but when I come out to work, I do not like the politics of my place of work," I replied

He smiled and said, "Read Malayalam literature, you will like Kerala

certainly."

Then he asked hesitatingly, "Would you like to translate a book of poetry; Sahitya Akademi may publish it—as it is an award-winning book."

I happily accepted. He took out an inland letter from his desk and dictated something to me. This time when I returned from his office I had with me a book of poetry.

I tried to read, but found it very difficult. I called a young git as a tutor to help me in reading and could complete the first draft of translation in six months. Ayyappa Paniker never asked about the translation after that and when I phoned him he said that he was very busy than and that he could see the translation only in the month of April or Mar.

I got an appointment to meet him in the month of May. I could meet him at 2pm at his residence. Not knowing the exact distance, I reached the spot 10 minutes prior to the appointed time. I rang the doorbell but the door would open only after 10 minutes. Ayyappa Panike told me, "I was serving food to my daughter, that was why I asked you to come at 2 pm." I found everything very strange in his home as though a storm was standing on the tip of his books. He introduced me to his wife and to his daughter Meena. He asked me to read the poems carefully; we continually worked for two hours, without any break or talk other than of poetry. At four o'clock he got up saying, I have to make tea for my daughter and wife; do you want to have teal! said, "No sir, thanks" and came back.

To complete the revision on his poetry I had to go to his hour for almost 18 days. I was very much impressed by his concentration At the same time I was astonished to see his devotion to his family His daughter was not too young, still she used to call now and the to her father, "acchana (papa)," and he immediately attended to demands. His wife would either be taking bath or dozing on the soft She became friendly with me and talking to her, I came to know here. Dr. Paniker made breakfast and cooked rice. Evening tea was also be duty. If the same to the duty of the duty of the same to the duty of t duty. If the servant did not turn up, washing utensils was also his the arrangements. These arrangements were due to the illness of his wife and daughter as I could understand in

as I could understand slowly.

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I was very much touched by his love towards his daughter. His daughter was constantly dependent on him for her smallest needs, "Accha, which duppatta should I wear with this dress" or "which slipper must I put on." Sometimes she used to come and say, "Accha, I am thirsty," and Ayyappa Paniker would immediately get up to make tea for her.

The most surprising thing was that Ayyappa Paniker never complained about his wife's or daughter's behaviour. He was looking after both of them like a dutiful traditional "wife". He used to call his daughter with so much affection—Miyaan: (her name is Meena) as though he was singing "Miyaan ki Todi". I have never heard a father calling his daughter so lovingly. By the time I could finish the revision of his book, he asked me to phone if any doubts cropped up, but not between 6 and 9 in the morning, as he cooked breakfast then (Kerala breakfast is not an easy job as they have a variety of curries). After that he took his bath and then his breakfast. By the time he comes to his study room it would be 9 am. I was too shocked to know this, as I could not imagine that there was some one who never complained about his duties. He never wanted to talk about the problems in his family, so he accepted his duty saying, "See people go for walk, I work in the kitchen, and this gives me exercise. You know all the Rasas are in the kitchen, we take a lot from there to poetry." I must admit, at the end of this translation session I became his admirer.

After the book got ready, he told me, "Next time you go to see your mother in Delhi, go to Kedarnath Singhji too. He is my friend and he will let me know about your translations." Once he judged my translations from different sources, he loaded me with a number of works of other Malayalam writers. He made me translate Balamani Amma, Karoor, Thakazhi and others. I felt that he had found a translator in me and was utilizing me for Malayalam literature. This annoyed me at times. He kept on introducing me to big names of our times like Ashok Vajpeyi, Kedarnath Singh and Vishnu Khare. This habit was also becoming quite painful to me as none except Kedarnath Singh gave me any importance, as they might have taken me as just another product of Paniker's group. Once I complained to him about his habit of introducing me to big people, saying, "I am nobody in Hindi literature, how can they accept me without any background? When you introduce me to them, they get suspicious. So please do not introduce me to anyone."

He replied, "See, I am doing this for Malayalam literature, not for

I was shocked by his bluntness. But this was Ayyappa—some times very affectionate, sometimes very blunt.

People in Kerala know how difficult it is to go to Paniker's home and how difficult Paniker himself was. I could not go to his home after the translation of my first book. Time to time I was too disturbed by his strange behaviour. He was always loading me with translation work He made me write a book on Balamani Amma, but he was also careful that my work should not go waste. As soon as my works got over he used to pressurize concerned people to publish or to pay me. He had quite a few strange habits—he could call me any time, if he wanted me to do some work of translation of any Malayalam writer; but at the same time when I called him he would put down the phone saying "vilikyaam" (I will call you). Sometimes he used to ask me, "Are vou coming this side? I have to give you some material for translation." But once while passing through his way, I had gone to his home, he had refused to see me as he was very busy correcting the English translation of Karoor Neelkanta Pillai for Sahitya Akademi with the translator. was extremely disappointed by his behaviour. He never got time to listen to my complaints. Ayyappa Paniker was always in a hurry, he did not have time to stop — chareveti chareveti - this little man was always working at home, in the office, in literature and out of literature.

There were a few things for which I will always miss him. Whenever I went out for any seminar or tour he would want me to inform him of each single detail about the function. He would give me some names and ask me to meet them; he never forgot to say shubh yatra except during his last days when I was coming to Kalady. Actually Ayyappa Paniker was a man of relationship. He has developed a number of relationships with a number of people. All relationships were different, from person to person. His relationship with Balamani Amma was 1 relationship of deity and devotee. He almost worshipped her. He himself had a number of admirers, both men and women. Each one has 1 different story to tell about the generosity showed by him towards them He had sharp eyes to pick a proper person. I remember the release function of my book on Atharvaveda—that time, he was not well but he himself asked me to conduct the function. I asked him, "Sirl You are not well, so we can postpone." He said, "No problem, you arrange and the said, "No problem, you arrange are not well, so we can postpone." every thing; I will come there, even though I cannot speak" and well on to ask me about the speakers in the meeting. At last he suggested a strange name, "You should call a young teacher named Radhakrishnan he is somewhere in the University." He knew him only by his first name nothing more, and for me it was very difficult to find out such a personal Avvanna Papiles. Ayyappa Paniker was quite sick by that time. Still he phoned me several times, to ask (TD) times to ask, "Did you find out that young man?" I was too world

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as I could not disturb him by telling that I had failed in finding out that person. Luckily I could find out the man, he was a Lecturer in Malayalam in Sanskrit University. When I, talked over the phone to him, he was astonished, as he had never talked to Ayyappa Paniker before. He recalled how he had criticized the cover page of Paniker's book. Radhakrishnan is too shy a person but quite knowledgeable and the sharp eyes of Paniker could guage his capacity. There is no doubt that Radhakrishnan's speech was the best and well received in my function. I am sure Radhakrishnan will never forget Ayyappa in his life.

Ayyappa's relationships had a gentle face too, right from Niitanne iivitam sandhye, niitanne maranavum sandhye (You are life, Sandhya, death too you are, it's you who grow dark, it's you who disappear, it's you it's you Sandhye!) to "Holiday Whispers",(Ozhivu kala samvadam) and Poetry at Midnight (Pattumanippookal)—Ayyappa was talking about very sweet relations and the pain accompanying those relationships. There is no doubt that he lived with those relations and they were with him till his death. A few days after his death, I got Colleen's (Paniker's Sandhya) phone number from a card carelessly kept inside my book. I called her and informed her of Paniker's death. She replied in a typical American style, "Oh I am sorry, did he have a heart attack?" I told her that he was sick for quite some time. She replied, "I am sorry, and thanks for informing me." Her voice did not have the sweetness of relationship, I could not tell her—O Sandhya, your sun has set, he has woven a golden dress of words for you, it is your fate that you could not wear this dress....No...No...now I understand those words were not for any particular relationship; those words were for all the relationships which grow in this world as flower or dawn. These words are for those relations which take birth in the heart of every man and woman—these words are from a saint who believed in human relationship more than in God. Ayyappa Paniker is not dead; he is not past tense, he is here in this world, in those poems, in those memories, in those sweet words that he gave us.

Rati Saxena / 35

The Poet Who Will Never Die

Damodar Mauzo

NanoharRai SarDesai, (1925-2006) who can easily be described as Manoharkan San Security of San writing poetry at an early age. The atmosphere around him was conducted to writing as his father had already achieved fame as an eminent Manuh short story writer. However, his poetry flourished when he was persuing higher studies in France. He was conferred a Doctorate in Literature by the Sorbonne, Paris for his thesis was on "The image of India in France" where he was overwhelmed by strong feelings of nostalgia for he motherland. A stream of poems started flowing uninterruptedly, pulsaing with a rhythm of its own and rich with colourful imagery. He sang of the lush green fields and the blue sea, of the softly singing birds and the whispering palm trees. Goa was then ruled over by the Portuguet ManoharRai wrote intensely inspiring poetry that condemned colonialism and instilled patriotism.

ManoharRai's six years of stay in France and the subject of be thesis brought him in close contact with the writings of some of the

luminaries of that country like Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Romain Roland As he confesses he could learn and understand India better through the views of these great European scholars who had written extensively India. He was also fascinated by the new trends in writings emerging

in Europe. As he knew Portuguese, French and English he could reliable the beautiful t the best of western literature. Pablo Neruda, Garcia Lorca, Paul Elizabeth Communication of the Communication of t Albert Camus and many others were his favourites. While in France, by

came in close contact with some great Indian painters like Laxman Paritock C. Raza, Paritosh Sen and Shakti Burman. He also interacted with Front intellectuals and

intellectuals who were opposed to colonialism which reaffirmed his in socialism and done in socialism and democracy and helped him to take intellectual

ideological positions.

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liberat identit recogn meted of this of the

exploits exploite ManoharRai SarDesai wrote extensively on topics varying from patriotism and socialism to love and romance. His poems can easily be categorized into several phases.

The first phase was that of nostalgic poetry. Goyam Tujea Mogakhatir (For the Sake of Thy Love, O Goa) is a collection that depicts the poet's wistful state of mind while he was in a far-off country. He is full of praise for the picturesque landscapes, murmurings of the springs and the waves of the Arabian sea washing the feet of his homeland, Goa.

The second phase is clearly full of patriotic songs. Aiz Re Dholar Poddli Boddi (The Drums Have Started Beating) and Jai Punyabhu Jai Bharata (Long Live the Holy-land of Bharat) are collections that sent a stern warning to the colonizers. He also dreamt of the bountiful fertility of the land of Goa in his poems, as he said,

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Our palm trees will yield such big coconuts, And the fields will produce three crops a year; Tomorrow's Goa will refuse To accept these alms of yours

The 450 years of an alien suppressive rule had turned its Goan subjects apathetic towards the freedom movement. SarDesai's poetry rekindled the fire of patriotic zeal in Goan society. Ram Manohar Lohia, on reading ManoharRai wrote, "Manohar possesses the lyrical quality of which good poetry is made. In the poems that I have read, this lyricism is coupled with patriotism..."

The third phase is an extension of the second one. Goa had been liberated from the clutches of foreign rule. However, Goa's independent identity faced a threat. The language of the soil was not getting its due recognition. ManoharRai wielded his pen fiercely to fight against the injustice meted out to his mother tongue. Zayat Zage is a representative collection of this phase. In this the poet gives a clarion call to the masses to beware oppressors who came in the guise of protectors.

Then comes a phase where the poet expresses his concern for the exploitation of the masses. But he found a novel way of tackling the exploiters and the unruly politicians. Poems like "Hi Lokshai" (This is

Damodar Mauzo / 37

Democracy) were satires that ridiculed the wrongdoers leading to their demoralization.

In the next phase we find a new form of poetry invented by this poet. "Zayo-Zuyo" is a term used by the poet for this new form of poetry that is pithy but rich in content. Armando Menezes wrole "Zayo-Zuyo" (Jasmines) is a precious little volume that is reminiscent in its discontinuity and epigrammatic character, of Tagore's 'Stray Birds' but is otherwise original—and almost entirely Konkani. One cannot imagine it in any other language." Even a senior poet like B.B.Borkar once confessed that Manohar's new form of poetry inspired him to write similar poems Pissollim, (Butterflies), his next collection also has similar poems. Veteran Marathi critic M.V. Rajadhyaksha in his review of Pissollim says "These short poems are of anything between two and seven lines each, comprising a thought or a fancy within those narrow limits. Such poems call for uncommon economy and precision of expression, the qualities Manoharka SarDesai has in remarkable measure."

P. L. Deshpande praised the Konkani poet after reading Pissolin He said, "To tell a story of sixty words in four words requires a mould of imaginative power and a genius mind that can extract a small dop of essence out of a thousand experiences. The poet provides a vision to look at the ocean through the drops."

His poems were simple yet philosophically rich in content. Though ManoharRai did not believe in preaching, he had a definite philosophy of life that can be sensed and felt in his poems. He lived a peaceful and leisurely life taking difficult times in his stride. Some critics have called it a 'creative lethargy'. He loved to make the people around him happy At difficult moments, he cracked jokes to ease the tension. He used say, "Life is worth exactly what it costs. I pay what is my due and enjoy what I get."

ManoharRai SarDesai was a poet of all and sundry. He wrote with such simplicity that he could easily touch the hearts of the masses. It use of rustic and living language, simplicity of expression and artistic maneuvering, made his poems very popular across all sections of social in Goa and other Konkani regions. His poems inspired a number of young men and women to take to writing poetry. For a long time, of could see the influence of ManoharRai on these young poets. Such the motivation that even young readers who had no literary background from both the Hindu as well as Catholic communities, felt like government to the incommunities of the like government to the expression to their emotions through verses. He thus came to be known as the poet of poets ManoharRai had a flair for punning. His mastery over language

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was so great that he could play authoritatively with words. 'Fenny is funny' is one such felicitous pun that comes to mind. He had a razor sharp memory. Quotes of famous intellectuals were on the tip of his tongue. He was a polyglot who could speak, read and write many languages. He wrote poems in French which were promptly hailed by the French.

Impressed by his genius, Jean-Luc Proffit wrote, "He likes to make things simple...To make the situation look simple, one has to SEE it as simple; and that, for sure, is not so simple...It requires a great talent and sharpness of observation." ManoharRai had a wit that kept his listeners glued to him. He could make complex things look so simple. Proffit narrates his experience thus:

> I remember how once he introduced the French Revolution. The root of the French Revolution is a root: potato; and the seed of the French Revolution is a seed: coffee, meaning 'café'. How could one better summarize the situation of eighteenth century France by relating both the nutrition, which allowed people to think further, and the turmoil of ideas symbolized by drinking coffee at the Paris Cafés?

However, the poet's greatest contribution to Konkani were his lyrics and rhymes written for children. The crow, the frog, the cock, the fish and all the animals became the characters of his rhymes and children lapped them up. He loved to be with children. He told them tales and jokes, rendered rhymes and songs for them, played the mouth-organ, showed some magic tricks that he had mastered and even played games with them. He lived to see the rhymes written by him becoming folksongs in his lifetime.

Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1980 for his collection, Pissollim, he went on to earn many more national and international laurels. Goa State Kala Academy Award, Highest State level Gomant Sharada Puraskar, Rashtriya Hindi Academy's Satvahan Award and The French Award Palmes Academiques are some of them.

The death of ManoharRai is a great blow to the world of Konkani literature, though I firmly believe that he will not only live on in the hearts of the thousands of his admiring students in Goa's Chowgule College and Goa University where he headed the Chair of French, but will rule over the hearts of all Goans forever.

Damodar Mauzo / 39

POETRY

Gulzar

Scars

Fresh News

Fresh news
Like fresh vegetables for the day's consumption
Served on the newspaper's front page.
Eighteen corpses of shepherds
In Doda district, shot by terrorists
And left out in the sun
Where the sunflowers bloomed in rows

It's been happening for fifty years This fresh news

In Orissa
Floods have submerged fifty villages
The water leaps against their chins
Hordes of villagers converge to higher ground
balancing utensils, children, whatever seemed essential
And the water rises even higher
On the roofs are perched the old, the invalid
Shooing away the kites and vultures hovering over their heads

This took place two years ago And it happened ten years ago as well As old as poverty, is the news Fresh news

There has been a fire near Chennai Some mentally ill patients, chained to their hospital beds In the Fres

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All twenty nine charred alive
Looked like figurines etched in coal
Kept in Pompei's Museum
Those were buried in lava
In the eighth century
Fresh news! I watch it twice a day

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

As They Ran

DETRY

The skin beneath their heels Had begun to harden As they ran and ran

Gunshots went off in the lanes Like stars bursting over Kabul Balls of fire exploded like suns Blowing off houses

"Allah, Allah," Abbu croaked once more "Keep running—keep running."

This time though, Mehmood freed his hand Pulled out his *ghulel* from beneath his shirt Defiantly, to ask "Abbu who's side is Allah after all On their side or with me?"

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Naxalite

Stopping at the corner he turned to look into the lane He looked handsome in the moonlight

A few measured steps and he stopped at her door Raised his hand to knock

Just then she had opened the door No one there In the desolate lane

She turned back Lay on that cot in the courtyard Still dreaming

Just four days ago from this same cot
The police had taken him away in the dead of night
A Naxalite—that's what they'd called him

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Riots 1

The fervent gathering of an angry crowd boils over
The fervent gathering of angry crowds
Some descended from minarets and some from ledges
Some leapt over staircases and pushed aside walls
Some heard the azaan and rushed out
The others took their cue from the clanging of bells
Crazed anger in their eyes
All gathered in no time at the crossing of lanes
Both sides resolute
Looking to strike
The weapons of their faith
The verdict is out
Stone the other's God to death

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Riots 4

He had had no say in his choice of faith His faith was inherited from his parents To choose one's parents, how is that ever possible?

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Had his home been of his asking? Or was the land of his birth chosen by him?

He was just nine Why then, was he killed in communal riots?

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Now Don't You Worry About Khanam, Abbu

Don't you worry about Khanam anymore, Abbu. The sleeping pills have been stopped The medication is over

You know how scared she was in the nights Saw visions of flying tents in the sky Holding on to the wall she would say "Stop, stop, the house is walking away" No more of that frenzy now

The tank had suddenly entered our home That was on the night of Friday prayers Whatever we found, bits and pieces of her, we buried Now don't go worrying about Khanam anymore, Abbu.

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Riots 6

Nobody was killed in the city
Those were just names which were killed
Nobody cut off anybody's head anywhere
Some people had just chopped off caps, headscarves with heads in them
And this stream of blood you see on the streets

It was only spilt from where the voices had been slashed aside.

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Newspaper

I remained stained with blood all day
All day that blood continues to dry and turns black
A crisp film forms
Continuous scratching with the nails
Makes my skin peel
That awful stench of raw blood
Sticks by me
And clothes covered with black patches

Each morning the newspaper arrives at my home Soaked in blood

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Tapi

Foam at its banks, the river pants
The Tapi has cholera
The night-long riots and killings in the city
Have slipped through drains and gone straight into its stomach
All night the smell of burnt flesh
Has spread like a vile acid
All night it has thrown up poison
The Tapi is struck with cholera

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Backlight of the Sun

In the backlight of the sun Among the ruins of houses Afghan children are perched on walls. They look alive

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On the cover page of the American Art Journal
Smoke wafts slowly

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

The Bird

Flying away from the fan she perches on the bulb Snaps her neck smartly in the mirror This chit of a sparrow
Its chatter fills the room
It keeps me from listening to the news

So many have seen their homes razed
Turned into heaps of debris in Gujarat
And this one
Is taken up with adding fresh straws to its nest

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Gujarat

Boils have broken out on the whole body
Hands scratch at the legs
The feet are trying to rub against the neck
The neck is stuck in the head
And wild cacti grows out of it

The poison ivy of religion has left a fearful itch in its wake
The boils begin to burst
The foul liquid begins to ooze

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Taller Than Two Hundred Feet this Mushroom

This mushroom is higher than two hundred feet
Twisting, spiralling
It carries on its head a dense black umbrella
Of slowly unfurling smoke
All this emerged from the innards of a small bomb
And spread over all Kandahar
Daylight quickly plunged the city into night

In times to come
When a grandmother narrates the horrors of today
Children will take that too for a story
shut their eyes and sleep

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Words

A few words exploded on paper Some smoke, a few sparks And another poem caught the flame

Sitting in the burning city what more can the poet do Words cannot put out any fire Poems never filled any scars

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Baghdad

War debris piles up
For the first time
Have I seen so many arms, legs, hands, head and feet
Scattered around
They look like left over tools
Spare parts

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An arm, from a weaver, shakes still
Perhaps spinning the yarn yet,
This leg was a player's for sure
he was run out, killed as he ran homeward

This head rolls over
Remnants of poems rattle in it
Poems which have begun to unravel at the seams
The fingers are straining
It seems, to inscribe this date in the dirt

Each part was removed by the mechanic looking to mend their faults
He had disliked the din they made
Had dismantled them
And so had found a way to end their clamour

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

The Riots

The riots are passing by this street In a wild burst of noise

Such boisterous fun
Just like those Republic Day parades
They are jubilant as they torch buses
Shouting slogans together

Not a trace of sadness or anger
As if their team had just won the World Cup
And is making its triumphant way home

Translated from Urdu by Devina Dutt

Karabi Deka Hazarika

Don't Plait Your Hair, Yagnasheni

Don't plait your hair, Yagnasheni

Let the dragon cloud of your hair Spread across the sky, Hide the sun, moon and the stars Yagnasheni, don't plait your hair. O you, the one born of fire Hold in your eyes pregnant with fire The arrow head of the disaster-flame, Let them shed sparks, not tears. Later when you bind Your disordered hair Interweave it into a dragon's tail Not now Yagnasheni, Don't plait your hair. To smear with blood Your rough and disordered hair Wasn't it your swearing? The Panchajanya is not blowing The Devadatta is not ringing May be the right moment Is yet to come For the destruction of the Kauravas. The wretched wife Let down by the Five Pandavas, who Hide their cowardice and shame Under the shadow of your hair. Dharmaputra is ruled by scruples

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Yagnash

Partha disguises as Brihannala Brave Brikodar Is engrossed in what he feeds on. And the sons of Madri? Just don't remember them They are yet so tender The thought of blood might scare them away. Yagnasheni, you need no help Let a storm burst In the dark cloud of your hair, Let thunder roar Lightning strike and burn The gold palace of Hastinapur. Your thirst for blood Is crawling across our breasts Let Duhshasan's blood Freely flow and congeal into the dust. We have endured Enough of pain and humiliation Many a principle Has ended up in tyranny And now it is time Our rivers took a reverse course Yagnasheni Merry-making is wafting from the Kaurava quarters In the palace of a blind king The game of hope Is the game of death.

We have endured long enough
Being pawns of the cowardly husbands
Now is the time to repay
The bloody ritual
Of smearing dishevelled hair with blood.
We shall smear together
Our dragon pigtails with blood
Don't plait your hair now
Yagnasheni.

Translated from Assamese by Ananda Bormudoi

Blue Firefly

Blue firefly...hiding quietly...! I don't know how... inside my basket full of jewelleries.

So well mixed with the heap of bangles, rings and gems, That I failed to see it first.

Just like that the day passed.

With the coming of dusk, it started glowing bright ...the blue firefly...By midnight sparkling as if a blue diamond star. The darkness got startled... and stupefied marched out through my window.

With motions easy and soothing
The firefly glided up and down.
In the air spread blue snow flakes...
Can neither sit, nor sleep...strange night!

Saw in the mirror, my eyes, lips, hair All slowly turning blue. I wonder what people will say When they will see me tomorrow....

They all will know that deep down my soul there lies a blue firefly!

Translated from Assamese by Kaustubh Deka

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After You Left

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star.

Till you arrived
there was this intense desire
to meet with you
before the unknown caught with us,
a longing that had snowballed with time
since we were last together,
a desire to thaw
and deluge you with ourselves.

You gave us just two weeks for an absence of as many years, and what a melting away it was—of time, of us—as we hurriedly unravelled ourselves during that intense ethereal existence in the hypnotic trance of your presence.

That monsoon shower of your love revived our drought-stricken selves. We forgot who and what we were in our total surrender to your being near.

Then you left
and it was like a concussion
that jolted us
out of the amnesia of ourselves

and landed us into an amnesia of your visit

2

The stunning from that bolt of separation has eased, the amnesia that gripped us for quite sometime has melted away, there is a rush of memories now like a crowd trying to jostle out of a crowded space.

But we are in no hurry, we will let them out one by one to amuse us for the rest of time, till we meet again.

3

For quite sometime we wondered why the amnesia for your visit, only to see the reason as the fog started to evaporate.

Just as sweet goes with the sour in life so also the pain of your separation took the pleasure of our reunion-along, into the black hole of amnesia, and all we were left with was a vacuum, even a negation of your visit.

Yet, that denial could not last long for time stood still forcing us to look back for a second look of the time you spent with us.

It is that second look we are having

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as we gingerly traverse the forgotten territory again.

4

Your visit was short,
effervescent and intense,
so much packed with essence
and there is so much you have left behind
that it will take us quite some time
to gather and take in.

Memories are hazy at present and it is difficult to say if we have woken up from a dream or if we have started dreaming. But a dreamy feeling is there all the same all the time.

The lawns and the flowerbeds are deserted, the guava tree under the shade of which the kids played and spent most of their time is in the throes of separation, its boughs that made a swing for them are aching for their touch, the guavas refuse to mellow.

The birds come here askance for their new little friends, they refuse to have their bath, they deny themselves the grain.

There is no speech here, only your echoes, there are no tasks for us, save reflections, there is no music but your melody, there are no smells sans your sweet fragrances.

There is you and you everywhere and ours is a story of dissolution.

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5

We treasure more than anything else the vast treasure you left behind. We dare not open or flaunt it at once lest it dazzles us into arrogance or catches an evil eye.

It is a treasure to treasure, to last us till we meet again and till then to savour like old wine, in small sips and slow draughts that neither inebriates nor leaves me sober but lends that gentle intoxication that fakirs wallow in.

6

It was a sacrilege to make the beds you slept in, to tidy up the room you lived in, to give order to the disorder of departure, for there we sought your living touch that made us feel you were still around. Yet, weeks later when we spruced and tidied up, what a blessing to find little relics of your visit, your left-over presence, a treasure trove of objectsa frock here, a sock there, kids scribbles. drawings and crayon paintings, pens, pencils, pebbles, chewing gums and chocolatesthat are now our amulets and charms.

The miniature temple in the lawn that the kids so assiduously built

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with marbles, pebbles and stones is now a daily pilgrimage.
There, we watch Siva's Tandava, there we hear the flute of Krishna.

7

We rewind time and play it back trying to take in each moment now magnified in detail,

We playback time and let it go in slow motion or freeze it when we will to have your fill.

Your memories have now become the very current of our lives.

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Lakshman Rekha

Why did Sita cross the Lakshman-Rekha (or did she trip over it?) between life and death, that shrouded secrecy between light and darkness—

that ultra-thin divide between faith and longing that muslin-veil between appearance and reality?

Why did she pierce through that cryptic, crystalline wall stretching endlessly between good and evil to meet her abductor half way? To pursue a golden deer through an endless mesh of verdure, through tunnels of silenced shrieks?

Why did Sita throw herself away to the winds and the deserts? To the skies and the rivers? Rend apart her heart in glassy schisms—trample upon her own jewels, her own creations, her own crown of flowers?

Leave behind her own garden, her own home, her own aangan wrench in distressed pieces her own dreams, desires, drapings, sarees, ghunghat in wreathed agonies, show the fearful fissures engulfing her own self in the grand finale of fire and tears—

Was it to punish Ravana or Rama?

Moon-Spindles of Singhbhum

Weaving cane baskets
darning rags
making coconut-brooms
sun-drying dung cakes
for stoking half-dead fires
wrapping up crack'd huts
with muddy slime
along denuded roads
is what they know of
as destiny....

the dented coal-tar
the beaten corn
the wheat in meagre spread-outs
on the margins of highways
compose their lives....

their nude children progenies of darkness kick on the outskirts away from life, light or digital development....

their black burnish'd bodies
marvellous oily statuettes
used for hard sun-burnt labour
picking up firewood
or dry, half-rotten fruits
in deep, pachyderm-infested jungles....

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for back-breaking chores in devastated fields, farms or homes for leasing themselves out to lazy, lascivious males, owners or husbands in liquor-stupor.

The moon steadily blinks on these tired horizons of Singhbhum or Simlipal of Bethla or Bamnipal yarning her stories on an eternal spindle.

At the Glistening Edge

The veil'd hue of my organza

Ghunghat,

The muted sheen of my nail enamels,

Lipsticks,

No longer lure me to your shadow'd

Enclave....

My sharp, kohl'd eyes have dimmed with

The colours of life

While the soft scents of my bosom,

The undertones

Of my tinkering ghungroos have

Died down

And my dark, cloudy curls tonsured

To accommodate

This new life of explosion, expansion and extinction.

Your sapphire skies, emerald seas,
Incandescent butterflies, energizing breeze,
Aromatic flowers, blinking glow-worms
Circulate,
Activate
On the periphery of the penultimate zone
Far away
From prayer

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From faith
From benediction
From hope
From hopelessness.

The dull horizon stretches out
To the thin films of the deepening night,
The hide and seek sunrays peep
At the glistening edge:
I wait while life goes on...
I wait, as always, for the answer
As always, one thumb away from my clutch.



Sujata Chaudhry

Malika-I

One melancholy morning after all of them left the house one by one, she sat on the floor, alone, in the living room to chat with the doormat. The sun has just sunk behind the deep black mountains of clouds. Birds have stopped singing and dancing atop the trees. The house is shadowed with darkness. She questioned "every day you are trampled by many a foot, don't you feel pain?"

The doormat gave a speechless look. A moment passed. It replied "My body bleeds every time people trample upon me, leaving dirt to settle on me. But my soul never bleeds it remains untouched. But O! My dear! Your body and soul both bleed, when those two feet walk

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all over you again and again leaving dirt to settle on you till eternity. His stony words and merciless speech leave deep scars on your body and soul. I can see pain writ large on youyour eyes, face and deep in the heart. I am a doormat, you are Malika I am an inert object, you are a human being Yet, you have become a lifeless object in his hands much before throwing me into the garbage bin, one day he might throw you out of this house, out of his life by signing on a piece of white paper. Have you ever thought about this?"

Malika had no reply.

Minutes passed.

The door bell rang.

She opened the door.

Her son walked into the house wiping away his dirty feet on the doormat.

There was silence all around. Yet Malika heard the words 'divorce' 'divorce' coming from all directions, hitting her body and soul ceaselessly and mercilessly.

Malika-2

She works from dawn to dusk from dusk into the night, lights the candle in front of the tulsi tree, offers prayers to Ganpati, goes to the temples on Tuesdays, foregoes meals on Thursdays and Fridays,

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cooks the best recipes,
feeds all to their
heart's content
washes clothes, cleans utensils
day and night, makes home
a paradise on earth.
They call her a cipher
a zero, not the golden one of course.

She is less than the least, the lone 'one' that cannot make 'ten' leave alone 'millions'.

She cannot discuss, she cannot decide, she cannot give orders or advice.

No one pays her any attention. So what, if a heart is broken? Hearts have been made but to be broken.

Yet she glows in a strange radiance, the radiance of motherhood. Quietly and patiently rising above distress, illness, grief and loneliness, herself remaining a zero her children she shapes as heroes.

Malika-3

Today is the fourth day in her new home.
She is yet to adjust to the new surroundings, new people, and new life.
The house is packed with strangers.
Suddenly a male voice whispers "the food was not good

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for the baratis"
She lifts the veil.
It is the father-in-law.
A female voice says 'yes'
And adds "her ornaments are light weighted"
It is the mother-in-law.
Another voice continues,
"She is very dark and not so good looking."
It is the sister-in-law.

And during the night
when the musky moon
happily dances with the stars
and stops to converse with the floating clouds,
on the chest of the sky,
Malika's dreams are shattered,
when a heavily drugged husband,
babbles, repeatedly
into her ear:
"I am the master
you are a slave
I will dictate
and you shall obey."

Two drops of tears
roll down Malika's eyes
(to be followed by many more
in the years to come)
as her universe disappears
in total darkness.
The full moon of happiness
vanishes from her life's sky
along with the dreamy stars

And in not so distant a land, in a tiny house, the story of yet another hapless young bride begins!

STORYTIME

Ascent Heavenwards

Chaganti Tulasi

On that day, an awful row broke out between Poli and her husband Appala Kondayya. She rushed to the hut in high spirits. But, as soon as she stepped in, he began to spit fire.

She thought that he too would be as much elated as she was. She couldn't imagine that he would kick up a row in that way.

He burst out in anger, "Can't afford even gruel. Look at her purchasel Good-for-nothing woman! Wretch!" Stamping his foot furiously, he bellowed.

"I didn't pay cash for this purchase. How can I make cash payment Do I have any money? Hardly a penny. I'm penniless and so are you We simply can't buy it in our life time. Somehow or other, it just happened for our benefit. Pedda Ammagaru said that a rupee will be deducted per month. So I bought it. It can be paid off within ten months." Pol tried to give the details.

However, Appala Kondayya didn't stop hurling abuses. As a matter of fact, he returned to the hut in a nasty mood. He left the hut a daybreak and returned now. He went around in town till he was ured But no work.

"Damn it! Whose inauspicious face" have I seen? Didn't get evel a tobacco leaf. I was ready to work but none hired me."

Having failed to get any work and having failed to get at less some tobacco, he returned home late in the evening, in a famished condition. The wife went out to wash the dishes at a Brahmin household. He searched each and every clay pot and pan. Nothing. It seemed as if Poli didn't even make the fire. He began to brood—who knows whether she would light the stove tonight at least and cook something? Heaving a sigh, he squatted down listlessly on the verandah and leaned on the woold pillar. Poli arrived with her son astride at her waist. She was carrying

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on her head a bright aluminum pot cushioned on a piece of coiled cloth. She laid down the son on the verandah and set aside the pot.

Immediately Appala Kondayya picked up a quarrel.

On that day Parvatamma called in a hawker quite casually. She wanted to drive a hard bargain with that hawker who was bartering aluminumware and plastic-ware in exchange for used clothes. Her intention was to get a nice article in exchange for her own two sarees and three trousers of her husband. However, the hawker, a North-Indian woman, went on saying in a high-pitched voice and with exaggerated gestures that the clothes shown by Parvatamma were almost worthless. At long last, she agreed to give an aluminum pot but demanded one more saree. Quite reluctantly Parvatamma tossed in another saree and received the pot. She did so only because she liked the pot very much.

Yet, she was very upset when her husband came back from his office and her mother-in-law from attending a religious discourse. They both simultaneously ridiculed and scolded her saying, "Bought an aluminum pot! Shame! Disgrace! And you are thrilled as if it were a stainless steel pot and bought it!"

Therefore she tried to persuade Poli, "Those old clothes are worth at least ten rupees. I will take one rupee a month from your pay. Take the pot for ten rupees." Parvatamma was eager to get as much money as she could.

Poli's joy knew no bounds. In high spirits, she came home with the pot. Immediately, a high row broke out.

Of course, Poli went on answering back to Appala Kondayya. "What are you talking about? This is my will and pleasure. I bought it with my own hard-earned money. Good Heavens! Why are you wailing as though I squandered your money? Have I ever pestered you to buy a pot? Have I ever told you that I'm in need of a pot? I bought it on the spur of the moment. One must weep if money is wasted on an outsider. For our own home I bought this pot."

Natsayya heard the noisy quarrel. He noticed the mounting rage in the tone of Poli who was in full frenzy and answering back to her husband. What is this quarrel for? The old man and woman (his parents)

went away to live separately. Thus wondering, he rushed into their hut. "What's the matter, Appala Kondayya? What happened to Poli?" When Narsayya came in with the intention of settling their quarrel, Poli and Appell II. and Appala Kondayya calmed down. To have a third person raising an

she would

Chaganti Tulasi / 65

accusing finger at them was an insult to them. Their attitude was that he may be an elderly person, yet he has no right to poke his nose into their private life.

"Nothing", "Oh! It's nothing," said each one of them. Natsaya cursed himself for being foolish enough to intervene in a quarrel between

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a man and his wife. So he hung his head and left.

After Narsayya's departure, Poli looked at her husband intently. She realized that he was starving. Wondered whether he had taken at least tea. She understood the reason for his anger and quarreling. This anguished her greatly. She laid the child on a threadbare cloth spread on the floor She put a pot on the wooden stove in order to heat water.

Went on brooding—what a wretched life! We are unable to have even gruel! So much suffering! None of the gods and goddesses is taking pity. Of course, at present, we are only three. Me, my husband and our child. Until the other day, the entire family used to live under one roof. The father-in-law, mother-in-law and brother-in-law and we-all of us stayed together. We were starving. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger, the old man used to wail, "I wish I were dead. Death is better than this hellish torment." The old woman used to say, "Who knows what we did in other lives? Is it that easy to lose one's life? Will He summon us at all?" Hunger! In addition to it, daily quarrels! Having observed this day after day, the brother-in-law moved out along with parents. God alone knows what was on his mind. He said that he would look after them. Now there are fewer members in the family. But, what is the use? My husband has no work. We go on starving."

She got the lukewarm water ready and called her husband She cooked gruel with coarse pieces of rice brought from Parvatamma's house and thought—the truth must be admitted. Parvatamma gives me some course grits of rice whenever I clean rice. She is kind-hearted. Appul Kondayya calmed down. He had a wash with the tepid water. Sat down in the doorway and began to gobble the gruel from the clay pan noise

Poli was sitting leaning against the wooden post and nursing the

The circular shapes etched on the pot were glittering like silve child. coins.

"Tell the truth. Is this pot necessary for us?" Appala Kondaya asked his wife gently.

"I have been hankering after it for a long time. Parvatamma wants to give away and so I took it." Poli told her husband much more gold loved by

Poli loved her husband deeply. Appala Kondayya also loved to the none of the n deeply. Had they been rich, their love would have come to the note of all as an ideal love.

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"I have been hoping that Parvatamma would speak to her husband about me and get a job for me. But she never raises this topic."

"I also requested her. Daily I request her. The master says, 'He needn't come. I myself shall inform if any vacancy arises.' They say, "He needn't hang around our house at the cost of his daily earnings." "Earnings! My foot! Today I didn't find any work."

"Other fellow-labourers run cycle rickshaws and make a living." "Couldn't manage to get a rickshaw. Owning rickshaw is impossible.

I have failed in even hiring one."

"I heard that rickshaws are being distributed. It seems loans are being given by banks. Alas! We don't get anything!"

"How can we? Without the patronage of some V.I.P. nothing is available. Who is going to call me on his own and give it to me? My case has to be recommended. How about requesting Parvatamma's husband?"

"If it were possible, he would have done it by now."

"Yes. You are right. We are destined to suffer like this. What can anybody do?"

Venkatasamy arrived and greeted Appala Kondayya.

"All the huts of our folks in the low-lying area were demolished," he informed.

"What? The low-lying area?"

"Yes. That's it. It seems Sendiri and her kids were awake all night by the roadside. None had a morsel of food. Today, they came over here with all their belongings."

"Sendiri and her kids! In that case, what about my folks? My parents and brother shifted to that street!"

"I heard that the bulldozer didn't come up to your father's house. Your people escaped. Our locality is also under the threat of demolition. I don't know what to do, where to go."

"What did we do? Why do they demolish our huts?"

"They are leveling the ground. Instead of that, if they run the bulldozer over us, this misery will end. Then we needn't die daily."

"Well said, Venkatasamy! It's better to die. We shall go to Heaven," said Poli.

"What makes you think so? Heaven after death! Heaven for folks like us!" Appala Kondayya commented.

"What are we enjoying? Tell me. Our life itself is hell." "I just can't understand it. You explain. Our houses are nothing but huts sitting on the riverbank. Why do they destroy these? Why should the rich in the the rich indulge in such an activity?"

"Our huts are ugly for them."

"If so, let them build two-story buildings for us."

"He so, let them ball and you want two-story buildings, death said Poli.

"No, I'm not asking for a two-storey building. I said so only because they consider these huts to be ugly and repulsive."

"They say that our huts are causing them acute suffering like ulcers"

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"They are bulldozing the huts just like a doctor removes the ulcer surgically," said Venkatasamy.

Mallu stormed in looking as if he were possessed by a spirit He came in looking for Venkatasamy. He too came from that street in the low lying area. His adolescent blood was boiling. Whenever a rally was organized, he also joined it waving a flag like the rest. He knew by tolt what the organizers of the rallies would holler.

"These are all cancerous growths. They grow repeatedly from the same spot on which operation is done. To check their recurring growth their base should be slashed. They do not originate from the huts but from those tall buildings. The skyscrapers! They ought to be wiped out instead of these huts. Those tall buildings are to be pulled down. Should be leveled to the ground. Then only the cancerous growths stop recuring"

"Don't shout unnecessarily. This isn't a meeting. Not even a rally You are highly keyed-up," said Venkatasamy.

"We may get keyed-up, or we may keep numb. It makes no difference. Our lives won't change.

"What sin have we committed? In which life?" said Poli.

"There's no work. No gruel. If we lose the hut too..."

"Don't think that we will keep quiet," said Mallu and was about to say something more.

Venkatasamy got up saying, "The sky is overcast. Cool wind s blowing. You better sleep now. Tomorrow, early in the morning, let is go to the most influential person of this locality and tell him." Along with him Mallu also got up.

"Venkatasamy! I forgot to tell you something. Look at this pol." said Poli.

"Brand-new one?"

"Yes. Can you tell the price?"

"Seventeen or eighteen."

"Then, it's a bargain!" commented Appala Kondayya. "You complain about lack of work and lack of gruel. If so, how you but an about lack of work and lack of gruel. could you buy an aluminum pot? Hope you haven't stolen," Venkananan enquired. enquired.

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"Shut up! I am not that mean. I don't do anything bad. We have been starving, but never stooped to stealing. I won't ever. Parvatamma gave it to Poli. Each month she is going to cut one rupee from Poli's salary until is settled. Gave it just for ten rupees."

"Only ten rupees? Picked up cheap!" remarked Venkatasamy.

"That woman must be deriving some kind of benefit from this. Otherwise, why would she give away? They tend to count each and every grain of cooked rice," commented Mallu.

"She's very kind," said Poli.

"Don't tell me that. I know how kind they are!" said Mallu, getting up to leave. A blast of nippy wind whizzed past.

"Look! Lashing wind! Move out! Hurry up!" Venkatasamy and Mallu left.

A high wind blew and put out the kerosene lamp. Appala Kondayya closed the door. Pressing the two door panels hard, he bolted.

Poli lit the lamp once again and said, "It's going to rain cats and dogs."

"If it rains, tomorrow also no work, no income."

"What's the use of worrying? Whatever will be will be. Go to bed now."

"Hope father and others are all right."

"Go to them early in the morning, tomorrow. You better sleep now," advised Poli.

Lying beside her son, tucking him up with the loose end of her saree, she nestled against him.

Appala Kondayya covered himself with a gunny bag and curled up.

The hut was swaying due to the impact of high winds as well as torrential rain. The rain water was making its way down through gaps in the palm-leaf roof. The lamp went off quickly.

"Appala Kondayya! Wake up! Poli! Poli! Wake up! Floods! Flood water! All are awake. They are running away. Why are you sleeping like a log? Flee! Floods!" Somebody was banging at the door. Appala Kondayya was startled and woke up.

He opened the door. But, what was there to see? All the people of the entire street were fleeing. The young and the old, carrying their belonging belongings on the head, were running in the darkness. Lashing wind. Due to darkness when he fully to darkness, it was not clearly visible. He rubbed his eyes. When he fully grasped the situation, shivers went down his spine.

"Good God! Oh my God!"

"Poli! Poli!" He called. By then, she already got up and came to

Chaganti Tulasi / 69

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"Floods! Poli! Floods! Let's go. Come on. Quick. Fetch all a least look at the possible of the goods. Throw them outside the hut. Just look at the people! They're legging it!" Highly frightened and agitated Appala Kondayya caught hold of whatever articles he could lay his hands on and dumped them in the street. While she was handing over the things, he was carrying then out in a flash—pots and pans, tins and cans, winnow and broomstick a straight cot etc. They both bundled up their belongings.

"Move out! Be quick! Hurry up! Run!" said he, panting. He plate! the upturned string-cot on his head. Then put all the goods along with the tin trunk on it.

"Hold the child. I'll rush in to the hut just to verify if anything is left out."

"Nothing else is there. Come on! Run!" he took the boy into his arms.

"Alas! The aluminum pot! Brand new pot! It is left behind" "To hell with it. Run! Run! Is it more important than your life Run!" Appala Kondayya began to run fast.

He ran without turning back, oblivious of everything else. Ran helter skelter through the wind, rain and darkness. In utter panic, stumbing and straightening up, went on and on till he was out of breath.

"Poli! Take the child," saying so he turned around. She wasn't thet Shouting at the top of his voice "Poli!" He was about " turn back.

"She'll come. But if you go back now, you can't return," sapa so others shoved him forward.

Appala Kondayya thought that she must be somewhere among the running crowd or she might have gone even ahead of him.

Jostling, trampling, shoving, ramming, pressing one another searching for their own kith and kin, they all surged towards the many situated on a very high ground and gathered there. However, Apple Kondayya couldn't find his wife there. He went on asking one and like a lunatic, "Have you seen Poli? Have you seen Poli?"

He has been hearing about the river's tendency to have flash flow But, this was his first experience of floods. Despite the talk of electronic had be given and the civer and the ci never had he given any thought to the possibility of floods. The fiver was full of huts—column was full of huts—only huts. Never had the hut-dwellers run away the river fearing it Oz di the river fearing it. On the other hand, they have been dreading denotes by a bulldozer and bulldoze by a bulldozer and have been discussing how to face that situation.

never thought, even in their wildest dreams, that the river would hound them.

Appala Kondayya couldn't find Poli. "She must have taken shelter in some other house," said others.

"I thought that she would follow close behind me! She said that the aluminum pot, brand new one, was left behind. Doesn't matter. Run, I told her. I was under the impression that she was also fleeing. Oh God! Poli rushed into the hut! Most probably, didn't come out at all!" Appala Kondayya broke down and began to weep like a woman.

Venkatasamy, Narsayya, and Mallu were not able to console him. "Calm down. Please. We don't know what has actually happened. Mallu will go to find out. You calm down."

Venkatasamy's wife took the child into her arms.

Translated from Telugu by U. Anuradha



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Laxmanrao Sardessai

Ter name is Geeta. I call her Geetul. She is my grand-daughter My daughter, Suman's child. Suman calls me—Kakal, So she has shortened in taught Geetul to call me-Kaka Aajjo2. This name she has shortened in her rather cute and newly acquired spoken tongue to-Tatajjo3 and stated calling me that.

Geetul is not yet two and a half but she has started speaking Stumbling and hesitating in her speech, she is a very sweet child. Anyone at first sight would love to sweep her into their arms and shower their love on her. Her eyes always twinkling with laughter add charm to be talkative manner. Long black lashes shade her eyes Jet black eyebrow, a wide forehead complete the picture. Suman had looked just like the when she was a child, fair and beautiful. Suman's chin was more or Geetul's slightly rounded. Both had curly hair. If you tied Geetul's log hair with a ribbon on the top of her head, she would look exactly literature a Sikh boy with a patka.

Smiling to herself, eyes shining brightly she looks across at me and then comes over. I would be involved in my writing. A story would have come to me in its full imagery. With her tiny hands she would tug at my free hand and say--Tatajjo Bhurr4...

I get up. My mind is no longer interested in the writing. At l

^{1.} Kaka: Used to denote father, also used to mean uncle.

Kaka Ajjo: Ajjo is used to denote Grandfather, the prefix of Kakko is used to identify a specific in the prefix of Kakko is used.

Tatajjo: A corruption done by the child when it is just learning to speak to combines two words. combines two words: Kaka Ajjo. Unable to pronounce 'K' she uses The hence 'Tatajio' 3.

Bhurr: In colloquial Konkani means to go outside the house for fun. I lead language mostly by a child when it is mostly by a child when it is just learning to speak, in its newly learnt language

walk slowly taking measured steps, Geetul rushes inside. Getting her mother to put on her boots she runs back, grasps my finger and pulling me to put on the door, she says—Thati. From the corner she picks up the umbrella, and then lifting her dainty hands asks in her loving voice—Dhatta?6

As I pick her up, she is overjoyed and claps her hands, hums a tune to herself, and joyfully compliments me—Tatajjo Bayoch..!7 While saying this she caresses my face with her open palms. And then with her rose red lips plants a huge kiss on my cheek.

We move out of the house. I carry her up to a small stream nearby and let her down. She seems to go mad seeing the water and jumps up and down in the stream. Then I hold her hand tighter.

It is sunny outside. The fields have become a verdant green. Her eyes dart up and down scanning these sights in wonderment, she exclaims— Aavishh.... As she sees other such sights the same words escape her lips. It is her way of expressing her amazement. How beautiful it all seems!

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We come to an open meadow. The new grass envelops the meadow on which I let her down. She runs on this and falls. Gets up, runs and falls yet again. If I go to catch her, she slips past me. Quite some time passes like this. When she tires of playing, she creeps into my arms and hands raised, pitifully asks-Dhatta? I then pick her up and pass my hands through her curly locks. Enjoying the pleasure she sings out-Mamache Gavala Javuya.9 She knows by heart all the verses of the songs. But she sometimes hesitates to recite them. At other times she chatters away without prompting.

Unknowingly my mind jumps to the past. It goes back twenty five years and I see little Suman in front of me. Her mother was the only one who gave her all the love and affection when she was small. From me you could say it was hardly any. I never held her or took her for a walk. Never taught her any songs. Never whispered any endearments into her ears. Never understood her needs or desires, since I was always into my writing or busy with my job, engrossed forever in my own world. I remained immersed in the antics of the imaginary

^{5.} Thite: In Marathi or colloquial Konkani, means 'there'.

^{6.} Dhatta: The word in Konkani is 'dharta' meaning 'catch', but in the child's language it becomes 'datta' since it is unable to pronounce 'r'. Here, it means take me in your arms.

^{7.} Bayoch: The word in Konkani is 'bharoch' means good, but in the child's language it becomes 'bayoch'. 'Tatajjo Bayoch' means 'Good Grandfather'.

Aavvish: cry of exclamation mostly used by children to convey surprise or wonder. 9. 'Mamache Gavala Javnya' or 'Let's Go to Our Mama's Village': first line of Konkani folk song taught to small children.

children of my stories. Busy in playing with them. In my literary creations there were so many characters, men, women, children, girls and in bringing them up, in flattering them, in following their day to day lives, all time was spent.

Whenever I was not writing my mind would be lost in an imaginary world. In this world I was brave, hunting tigers in the forest. I was kind, going to the huts of the poor, and asking about their well-being I was charitable, helping those in distress. I was wanton, wandering about in luxurious places. And showering love on the beautiful girls there Otherwise just for fun I would dress up the women in this make-believe world. Drifting thus through all the three worlds of heaven, hell and earth, I would find myself, after a while back in the real world.

During this time attention to little Suman and lavishing love and affection never figured in my scheme of things. This is because my mind would be lost in other pursuits. Some fifty sixty toys of Geetul are strewn around the house. There are cars, dolls, planes, dogs, ovens, grinding stones, cooking vessels. Most of the toys are wooden, some of rubber. There are dolls which shake their heads. There are those that close and open their eyes. There are birds which twitter. There are also snakes, mouse and such other animals.

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Geetul's father is not rich; he is middle-class. But he fulfils all the wants of Geetul. In reality, he is actually fulfilling his own wants. In her playing, in her singing he gets happiness. When he leaves the house he takes her image with him. He does not loose sight of this image even when he is involved in his work at the office or when he is in the market. Even when he is involved in complicated work, he keeps looking at her image in his mind's eye. He is encouraged by doing this. The moment he steps into the house he picks her up in his arms. Gives her a chocolate and starts dancing and jumping with her. He puts on the record for-Mamache Gavala Javuya. And both get immersed in this. They whisper to each other in their play acting. Assume fancy dress sometimes of the Gods and of people of times gone past.

At these times again I am reminded of Suman. She used to play with cloth dolls. She never picked up the courage to come to me for anything. And even if she did I would ask her not to disturb me while I was busy with my writing. Even if I had lifted her in my arms it was to keep my wife happy. The mechanical manner of the interaction bored me. My mind would wander away to my other world! And I would give all the dolls and toys to the children of my stories!

Suman's mother would resent all this to herself. She was too dignified.

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ld! And I tories! o dignified to express her resentment openly. What if I got angry? Both my wife and child were afraid of my anger.

I also add to Geetul's toy collection. Whenever I see a new toy in the shop, it comes home in a flash. Eyes widened and mouth open in surprise, she exclaims—Tatajjo...! In these words are included her gratitude. I pat her lightly on the back, lift her on my shoulders, and like a musician sing out—Pe Dhoom. 10 She also does—Pe Dhoom—and then dissolves into giggles and becomes consumed in her laughter.

After that she wants to play-Ghodo and gets down on her knees. Sometimes she asks me to become the Ghodo¹¹ and then I have to get down on my knees. She climbs on my back as the rider, springs up and down talking to herself as a rider would. She squeals with joy. Sometimes I put oil on her body. I massage her hands and feet, with my palms I rhythmically tap the oil onto her head. She exults in this experience and starts singing. Then Suman takes her to the bathroom and makes Geetul sit on her extended legs. I start pouring hot water on her head. Suman uses soap to scrub Geetul's body. With the warm water touching her body Geetul is happy. She plays with the flow of water falling on her body and laughs all the while, going into raptures, speaking to herself in her own baby language and starts humming one of her favourite songs. Suman towels her off and brings her out and starts putting powder on her body, when Geetul takes some of that powder on her dainty palms and puts it on herself. On her face, on her hair, wherever. With a thin green ribbon she would then try to tie her hair herself without letting her mother do it.

In a little while, dressed up like this she comes out and seeing me breaks out into a smile. There is a mischievous edge to her smile. She comes near to me where I am writing and calls out—Tatajjo! She touches my hand, and says-Basta! 12 I take her onto my lap. Her hands become restless seeing the various pens, pencils and papers on my table. She looks up at me and tells---I will not touch? I have warned her not to touch the things on my table. She remembers this. After some time when I am a bit inattentive, she says again—I will not touch? and suddenly attacks the table. I try to block her. She avoids me strewing things around on the table. With a lot of difficulty I am able to carry her away and leave her in between her toys.

Geetul picks up a new doll. She sits down spreading her legs. Puts the doll across her legs and starts feeding her with a bottle. Singing—

^{10.} Pe Dhoom: sound of drum signifying start of music. 11. Ghodo: Konkani for 'horse'.

^{12.} Basta. Konkani for 'sit' or 'want to sit'.

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I get only a little time to write. She takes up most of my time. I happily listen to her ceaseless chatter. If she does not come and prod me, my time does not pass well. I get up and go to my room. Whenever she is around me, she opens out a beautiful garden for me. I then imagine myself driving through this beautiful garden with her running behind me clapping her little palms in joy.

Then I am reminded of Suman. She would be nestling in the lap of her mother wearing a dotted frock. Her appearance would be dul and sad. In her lap there was no beautiful doll, no nice dress for it to wear, no one also to lavish love and affection on her.

Suman's daughter today has eight ten dresses for everyday weat. She has the same amount of innerwear. If the dresses get dirty then she needs to change. This has become a habit. If her hands get dirty she comes to wash them. If she gets a common cold and cough her father calls a doctor. If she gets a bigger complaint, her father becomes afraid, trembles, he does not cry nor does he get angry, but goes around with a jaded look. He puts on a sweater on her to ward off the cold gives her some medicine, puts a monkey-cap on her head. All this he does with his own hands.

My thoughts turn to the little Suman when she was bedridden suffering from cold and fever and bothered with a racking cough. Her mother was afraid then. When she told me to call a doctor. I would say, 'For a petty ailment, why call the doctor? Give her some kasai.14 Some days pass. Still, the cough did not leave her. Suman became wan and withdrawn because of the ailment. The cough did not even allow her to sleep for a while. She suffered all this in silence. Whenever she felt a bit better she played with some of her toy cooking utensils or made the cloth doll play out something for her. Her mother would be in the kitchen cooking. I would be wandering around outside doing good for the world at large. She made up stories about school when her elder brother was away at school. Suman does not have her own world to retreat to. Like the world of dolls, toys, play vessels, dresses that her daughter, Geetul is always immersed in. Whenever Geetul goes around her whole world travels with her. Today in Suman's world her biggest asset is Geetul. If Geetul gets a fever, her mother cannot concentrate

^{13. &#}x27;Dhol Baya Dhol Ge' & Kavlekakayno Saad Ye Ghalat, Aaj Aamgaye Bab Juli First line of Konkani folk songs taught to small children.

^{14.} Kasai: home-brew concoction made out of various herbs, jaggery & water of cure common ailments like common cold, cough, stomach ache etc.

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on her work in the kitchen. Her father does not go to the office. I on the person who gets more worried than her parents and just sit next to her. Geetul has three persons to care for her. Just a plain cold and fever, and what a turmoil there is in the whole house! The other day I got a silk ghagra-choli¹⁵ stitched for her. What elegance she showed after putting on the ghagra-choli! How great was her wonder! Wearing the ghagra-choli her father even took her to town and took a photograph of her! Like this, there are so many photos of her! In her first birthday's photos she looks just like the infant Krishna. A garland of flowers around her neck, bangles of flowers on her wrists, a crown of flowers on her head, how beautiful and godlike she looked!

My Suman was also so beautiful, but I never took special care to remember her birthday. Then, who would take the responsibility of celebrating her birthday? We have no photos in our collection of Suman when she was small. It never occurred to me to have her photos taken. I was always busy in the company of big people, and eager to get my photos taken with famous literary names. I was giddy with my own ideas and work and in all this, where was the time for me to understand little Suman's mind!

Geetul has been given a slate and pencils. She has also got a ruler. A picture-book. She draws lines on the slate with her pencils. In her scribbles, you can see the emerging pattern of a picture. I take the slate and show it to her father. He writes out—Shri G16—for her, she reads it as-Shi G-and wipes out the-Shri G-on the slate. She can count up to sixteen. When her mother calls out one, she says two, but somewhere between four and five she stumbles, and jumps to nine going up to ten then eleven. Somehow this exercise reaches sixteen. Seeing all this we are all very happy. She sometimes picks up a big book and opening a page at random will put her finger on it and read-Shi G. Opening the picture book she sees the animals in their varied colours. She can tecognize tiger, dog, cow and calls out their names. She also says—Shubh Kaloti Kalyanam. 17 Mind you: Suman is still just about two years old.

In all three rooms Geetul's playthings and toys are spread around. She strews things around, sometimes spoils them and even goes into

Laxmanrao Sardessai / 77

^{15.} Ghagra-choli: small girl's dress consisting of a blouse and a long skirt.

Toditionally chili

^{16.} Shi G: God's name, short for Shri Govinda or Ganesha. Traditionally children would start tracing out Shri G, or God's name written out by an elder on a slate when they start learning to write.

^{17.} Shubh Kaloti Kalyananr. Actually Shubh Karoti Kalyanam – modified in the child language to Kaloti, is the first line of a prayer invoking God's blessings in Konkani

the kitchen, brings out the utensils and starts throwing them about She has the habit of taking the things she likes and throwing them out in the front garden. Then she would look at all the things lying here and there and snicker to herself. In a while when her mood changes, she herself would pick up all her playthings and put them back in their box

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Again my mind slips back into the past. If I found any children's playthings or books on my writing table, I would get very upset. My wife would get the brunt of my temper. I would scold the children Seeing me thus Suman would go white in fear. She would take shelter behind her mother. I would still look at her searchingly.

Suman became six and started going to school. But I do not remember having asked her ever, "What are you studying, my child? I never applied myself very much to what she was doing. My interest was elsewhere. All my time was spent in teaching and making perfect the students in the school where I taught Portuguese. I would take my students out on field trips. Organise their games and urge them on in their passions. And my Suman would somehow learn in the village school with books that she would have got somehow. Nobody brought her books of pictures or stories, nor told her stories, nor took her out for a walk.

Geetul comes out wearing a frock, with boots on her feet, a school-bag in her hands, posing as if she were going to school. I enquire with her in fun—'School?School?' and give her a big hug and a kiss.

Little Suman would go to school in the rain. How she studied was nobody's business? If she got good marks at school there was note to congratulate her. Her younger brother, Rajesh was five years old. She would take him to school with her. She would take care of him if he had any difficulties or problems she would come back and tell he mother. If Rajesh fell on the way and bled from cuts and scratches. Suman was the one who cried. If he got bruised, she was the one who limped. Suman would do a lot of work both inside and outside the house. In her childhood only she became older, more mature, more sombre. Suman would take care of and worried for her older brother also. She assumed this responsibility automatically. Cautioned him when he wend out to play. Kept an eye on him when he was playing. If he fell, the helped him up and brought him back home.

Off and on Suman's mother fell sick. She would feel her head is spinning, and her heart is palpitating. At these times she would confine herself to bed. Whenever this happened Suman had to do the cooking also. She never complained. She looked after her mother and also finished all the housework. Suman's Marathi medium schooling got over. At this all the housework. Suman's Marathi medium schooling got over.

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time I got involved in the Struggle for Liberation. Consequently sometimes there would be no male person in the house. This created major dilemmas for those at home. One day while involved in a Satyagraha at Panaji I was sent to jail. Everything from the children's education to providing for the household was in a mess. Suman understood these problems. She assumed the responsibility for her brothers, talking to them as if she was their mother.

After about a year I came home, released from jail. Suman looked wan and tired from the work and the worry. I kept myself involved in the Liberation Struggle, without looking at the needs of my children or the well-being of my family. Sometimes the police came looking for me at home. Suman got a shock whenever this happened. Her mother's palpitation increased. Suman's studies were discontinued. All the work of the house rested now on her frail shoulders. In the house, she was the one who was worried about providing for everybody. In those trying times she pushed through the days thinking that those times would soon end and kept thinking about my well-being. My wanderings for the Liberation Struggle took me one day to one village, the next day to another. Sometimes hungry, sometimes with a little food in my stomach! My activities were a bother for Suman since I would be sometimes in the police chowki, sometimes in the forest avoiding them or sometimes inviting them to arrest me by participating in a Satyagraha at some village or other.

My boys began studying in the English medium schools. The impact of my involvement in the Liberation Struggle, and related adventures directly affected only Suman. She was the one who had to face the outside world, on a day-to-day basis take care of all the housework, worry whether I am safe. These were the thoughts that kept her busy the whole day. There was no diversion to her mind other than these obsessive thoughts. Like other girls she did not get to see a play or go to the cinema, or go for an outing, or read books. I was intoxicated with the idea to do something big in the Liberation Struggle, I argued with my colleagues. As I kept arguing and justifying my ideas, my mind grew bolder.

In the hustle and bustle of my mind, there was no place for the well-being and happiness of my family. Suman was the one who had to worry about how today would pass and tomorrow come. I would be in the company of Dr Lohia and others involved in the Liberation I would be mostly occupied speaking at secret meetings of the freedom dilapidated temples or be in a hurry to avoid the secret police and reach

Laxmanrao Sardessai / 79

the safety of the borders. In all this confusion, Suman was withering away both physically and mentally.

In my old age now a bud is flowering in my mind. The past is shining in a new light; my mind is becoming emotional triggered by gentle empathies. Just like once the cataract in your eye dissolves and you start seeing the distant mountains clearly, the trials and tribulations that my own flesh and blood had undergone becomes clear to me now

Now Geetul is on my lap. She is not letting me write. She is snatching my pen and paper. I put aside my writing and look into her laughter. filled eyes. As I keep looking those eyes seem to me to be those of Suman. Slowly I start seeing my daughter's shape emerging from the face of my grand-daughter. Then something or other pricks me. I hold Geetul to my heart tightly. And I kiss her.

Today Suman is showing the urge to do a lot of work. She is engrossed in her cooking. My eyes fall on some ten-twelve soiled clothes lying in the corner. I get up and make a bundle of these clothes, clasp them to my chest and rush off to the nearby stream, with the same hope and enthusiasm as I had shown during the Liberation Struggle

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Translated from Konkani by S Kamat

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Till Sleep Overpowers

Narendra Kohli

He roamed here and there feeling disturbed. He had glanced at his wristwatch so many times. He had even looked at the timepiece on the table, but his restlessness did not leave him. He had gone up to the door many times and come back. Many times he had given up the idea of going out and came back to sit on the sofa or lie down on the divan. Nothing made him feel at rest.

Ultimately he changed his clothes. He put his trousers and shirt on and got ready to go out. He put his shoes on as well. As he wiped them with a piece of cloth, he thought that now he would have to get out of the house, he couldn't wait any longer.

Suddenly he remembered that his wallet did not have much money, there were only four or five rupees in it. That wouldn't be adequate, he might have to go far. At this hour it would be difficult to get transport, he might have to take a cab. A bus was certainly not the best mode of transport one could use to look for a person.

He opened the cupboard and took out five ten rupee notes. It was possible for him to spend on things other than conveyance. Why did the casualty room of a big hospital loom large before him? A number of times he had imagined himself standing in front of pharmacies that remained open throughout the night

He shook his head trying to get rid of his thoughts. He picked up the lock put it on the outer door and came out of his room. As he bolted his door, he paused before locking it.

Where would he go at this hour? He kept staring at every woman on the road, not able to recognize any of them. Maybe there was something or did this happen with everyone...he could not recognize anyone from

far and as they came close, all of them seemed to be the person le was looking for.

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The last time he had got so worked up and set out to look for Shiela, she had come home the minute he had gone out of the house By the time he had spent fifteen rupees on a taxi and come home after his futile mission, she was waiting for him on the verandah, looking bord

The two of them had fought tooth and nail after that. He was any with Shiela for coming home late, it worried him very much. She, on the other hand, was fed up with his restlessness. After all she did no go out for pleasure, it was work and she got late because of it. Coming home dead tired and finding the house locked was enough to make anyone boil with anger!

He felt that he should wait for some more time. Maybe Shiela would come in a little while. It was a big city with a third rate transport system No big deal if it got late. After all why did he have to think that Shiele was in danger, waiting to be rescued by him...No, he should wait for some more time....

As he stood waiting, he saw a shadowy figure coming into this square moving rather slowly, in a tired manner. It looked like a woman, maybe it was Shiela. As the figure approached, he was quite convinced that was Shiela, and it really was.

He felt lighter as if a load was off his chest. Shiela was back albeit late. What difference did it make—a working person could get delayed He felt a sense of relief as if on a different plane. He would not have to go out in the dark, confront uncertainties and fears on the road li was saved from all that.

But a slight irritation persisted...why did Shiela not realize that he was concerned about her and...

Shiela looked at him in a strange manner and went into the rote crossing the verandah, without even a word to him. She had not stopped to the state of the state to talk about her troubles, nor did she justify her delay or admire that she had been in the wrong. She came and stood close to quietly as if expecting him to start scolding...

His glance fell on the room and he looked at her uncertainly. Neither did she say anything, nor did she appear to be in a mood to to him. She did not fling herself on the sofa as if nothing had happened to him. She could Maybe she could not make up her mind how she would broad matter to him matter to him...

"Yes, I am back." Shiela's voice seemed to come from some of

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Shiela would port system k that Shiele uld wait for o this square,

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plane. She had never spoken from this plane earlier. Then, as if testing his patience, she said, "I am late, am I not?"

His irritation hid itself like a beaten dog, "Yes, it is very late. But

you..."

"But you did not go out looking for me?" Shiela seemed to be

taunting him.

He felt embarrassed. Perhaps Shiela was making fun of his emotional nature. Then he summoned all his courage. What was wrong in getting worried about one's own wife? That was his nature. She could not make fun of him for this. He said in a normal voice, "Yes, I was thinking of it. See, I had taken out the lock and key of the main door."

"It kept on getting late and you kept on worrying?" There was a depth in Shiela's voice.

He got annoyed and looked at Shiela. She was looking straight at him and he could see the scratches on her face and forehead, bruises that had already started getting blue. He shuddered...Her hair was dishevelled and so were her clothes...Had Shiela been accosted by the wrong kind of persons? Maybe no, maybe yes, he told her every day, to avoid crowds, moving buses...He could only ask, "What happened to you?"

And Shiela's face crumpled. Maybe she was wondering how to confront him till now. Now there was no going back.

"Every day you were apprehensive about accidents. I would reassure you every day. But..."

"It had to happen today. I had been worrying about it..." He came closer to her, "I hope you are not badly hurt. Shall I apply some Dettol or something..."

His voice sounded very soft as if trying to soothe her wounds. Shiela did not answer. She sat down on the sofa, "No, it is not the kind of hurt that Dettol can clean up....I am very tired."

She lay down on the sofa and closed her eyes.

He felt that they had covered the initial distance between themselves. Now he could ask her about the incident and she could talk about it. He came very close to her, "But what happened?"

Shiela was still lying flat with her eyes closed as she answered, "The same problem about the bus."

The irritation he had been trying to suppress, burst out, "You must have tried to hop on to a running bus, isn't it? How many times have I told you..."

Shiela interrupted him, "No. I did not get on or off a running bus. I remembered what you had told me. Your words were not unheeded." He was surprised to find that his voice had calmed down and sounded

under control. He tried to calm himself as he asked, "Then what happened in the work of the work of the work of the work." Did you fall down? Did someone jostle you?"

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Suddenly his voice became shrill, "Then, why don't you tell me? You have injured yourself and now you come home and lie down quiette Why don't you say something? First I kept on waiting for you and worming now when I ask you what happened, there is no answer."

Shiela opened her eyes at once and she sat up as if she would reton sharply. But then she changed her mind. The aggression ebbed out of her and she collapsed into the sofa. "I will tell you everything. First get me a glass of water, please."

He went in to get water and Shiela sat up, as if in her senses. She took out her compact from her purse and looked at her face in its mirror, carefully, as if surveying the effects of an incident that had occurred in the past. Then she passed her hand over the scratches and bruiss, as if feeling them.

He had brought water for her. Shiela shut the compact, put it bad in the purse and shut it. She drank the water, kept the glass on the small table and lay down again. She had closed her eyes again.

He kept on waiting for her to say something. But she lay very quiet with her eyes closed, but he could sense that something was going on very fast in her mind, maybe a recalling of the events...as if an old in was being re-run...he could not wait any longer and said, "You was about to tell me something."

Shiela's upper lip curled as if making fun of him, "Won't you scoll me today for coming home so late? Women from respectable familie do not keep such late hours."

He felt like crying. Shiela was making fun of his love. But he not cry. He felt like giving a long speech with a bit of action, at the moment. "You know a person is most apprehensive about someone is is attached to. As you get late, I imagine the worst. I can almost visualize you running in the middle of the road to catch a bus and sudded another bus, truck or car comes and rams onto you. You lie in the middle of the road 11 of the road bleeding profusely and no one comes to your help to you are waiting at the bus stop, waiting...waiting...and there is no stop of a bus. It is too the of a bus. It is ten thirty, eleven, eleven thirty...and you get into the man the did not

But he did not say all this. He could only say, "I imagine the work on you get late."

Shiela asked in a listless manner, "What do you get out of pure inings." when you get late." imaginings."

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He looked at Shiela, stunned. Did she really want to know the answer to the question or was she making fun of him? He felt that somewhere at the back of her mind she held him responsible for this incident...and he was responsible. If he had not let Shiela work...but Shiela was working even before they had got married...

He came back to his earlier mood, "I imagine so many things and worry about them, pacing around the room. Sometimes I wait at the door looking out on to the street, but I know that these are just my

apprehensions. That is why I don't do anything.

Shiela got up and sat on the sofa. It was as if she had washed off her earlier expression from her face but had not cared to put on any other—it was a face devoid of any expression. In a detached manner as if talking about somebody else, she said, "I came out at ten after my duty. At about a quarter past ten I was at the bus stop. 10.20, 10.25, 10.30, still my bus did not come. This could only mean that the last bus had left before time or had missed its trip. I should have waited for some other bus. But I could not see any other bus coming this side. I kept on waiting, not being able to muster up enough courage to take a scooter or taxi." Shiela stopped for a while, looking at him to see how he took all this and then said, "At 10.45 a bus came. I waved at it to stop. The bus stopped. It did not have any board to mark its destination. I did not know where it was going.

"Maybe it was heading towards the depot." He lit a cigarette and

sat listening.

Shiela gave him time to inhale and then said, "Yes. The conductor said that the bus was going to the depot. I said, it does not matter, drop me at Ring Road."

"Was there no one else in the bus?" There was a note of apprehension in his voice.

"No, there were two other persons." Shiela said.

"Still, you showed a lot of courage." He was reassured. He took another puff at his cigarette.

"Yes." She said. "But both of them got off at the next stop. As the bus started, the conductor went over to the driver and whispered something. I suspected that they were up to something. I realized that I should not have got on to this empty bus."

He had stopped leaning and his back was tense, "Were they up to any mischief?"

There was an irritated look on Shiela's face, "Can't you make out

He burst out, "I know how people get fresh with a woman travelling alone. What can one say about the moral degeneration in our country.

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You can't trust a fellow," he controlled himself and lowered his voice "What happened then?"

"The driver turned off all the lights in the bus." She said, "You did not stop him!" His voice sounded agitated

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"No." Shiela went back to her expressionless voice. "I was very scared and could not speak. And then I did not want to provoke them in any way. I prayed to God that if I reached home safely today, I would offer prasad at the Hanuman Mandir at Connaught Place."

He had an expression of contempt. "This means that one has to go to the Hanuman Mandir at Connaught Place and offer prasad tomorrow

Shiela's face darkened with anger, "So, you think that I have reached home safe and sound."

He felt ashamed. Shiela's anger was justified. He laughed in a embarrassed manner.

Shiela went back to her story. Suddenly she seemed detached from all that had happened. There seemed to be no remorse in her, no anger She had become detached—as if all this had happened to someone else not her. As if her only link with it was that of a narrator. She was eager to narrate the incident in all its detail. As she would narrate it it would get out of her system, out into the world...

"As the driver switched off the lights, the conductor started humming pyar kiya to darna kya and came and sat next to me. I was very angr at his insolence and that gave me courage. I said in an angry voice, "The whole bus is empty. Why don't you sit somewhere else."

He felt a nerve tingling somewhere. In a choked voice he asked "Did he get up and go?"

Shiela's voice was still cold. "No. He did not pay any attention 10 my words. On the other hand, he crept closer to me, nestled up 10 me and said, 'My darling, why are you so angry?' "

He got up in his agitation, threw away his cigarette with a jetk and crushed it under foot. "I see. Did you note down the number of the bus?"

Shiela was untouched by his agitation. In a voice that seemed to be a voice to be a voice to be a voice to be a voice that seemed to be a voice to be a voic talk to him as to a child, she said. "Yes, I have the number. But listen...the is more to come. I knew something dire was going to happen. I pushed the conductor hard. He lost his balance and fell down from the self I shouted loudly 'driver, stop the bus...' "

He looked at her numbly and she went on as if narrating a story "He did not stop the bus. On the other hand, he increased the speed

"The roads were deserted. Not a soul could be seen. I was alor in the bus. The lights had been switched off and the bus was speed! alone." along."

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"How did you get out of it?" He swallowed as if something was sticking in his throat.

"Then the conductor got up and lunged at me. I had taken off my sandal. Incidentally, today I had worn my sandals with steel heels. I hit him hard with it. There were bruises on his face. His head had started bleeding."

"That was well done!" His smile was forced. "I would have hit him

harder."

Shiela looked at him as an adult looks at a bragging child. "Yes, I had thought the same but he did not give me the chance to call you from home. I hit him as hard as I could."

He then lit a cigarette and said, "Well done, well done."

"I went on hitting him but he did not let go of me. He put his hand in my blouse and tugged it. All the buttons came off..."

"What!" His hair stood on an end. "Give me the number of the bus. I will do something at once... Horrible! How can one live in this country? No woman is safe here."

Shiela did not think of him. She went on as if she had to get it out of her system. She would stop only after she had finished. "By then the driver had parked the bus in an isolated spot. Then he came up to me as well. They gagged me with a piece of cloth and tied up my hands..."

He could hardly speak, he was so agitated. There were tears in his eyes; Shiela was still sitting calmly as if all this had not happened to her she was narrating someone else's experience.

"How did you escape them?" He asked in a voice that was choked. "How could I?" Shiela laughed in a strange manner. "I did not." And then she started crying, The first time it seemed to dawn on her that all this had happened to her and hurt her very deeply, "The two of them took turns..." She covered her face with her hands. She was

He was absolutely numbed for a while. It took him some time to come back to some kind of normalcy. He was full of resentment and a kind of fear. After a while he realized that this incident had frightened him, and he was angry with her for putting him in such a situation.

"Why didn't you stop them? Why didn't you put up a resistance?" He said almost with a scream.

Shiela suddenly stopped crying. There was not pain in her eyes now. She felt that she had been apprehensive that such a thing might happen. Though she had not admitted it to herself, she had known that consciously her husband to prove her husband might...maybe she would have to fight her husband to prove

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her integrity... There was an edge to her voice, "Does it seem to her integrity... I did not put up a resistant to her voice, "Does it seem to her voice," from whatever I have said, that I did not put up a resistance?

His anger did not abate even as Shiela said this, "The conductor His anger did not about was all alone till the driver joined him. Why didn't you jump out of the bus?"

Shiela looked at him, eyes wide open in surprise. "You mean, I should have jumped out of the bus going at full speed. You are the one who told me never to get on to or off a running bus...maybe you cannot even imagine how fast the bus was running. If I had jumped out would have surely died. No power in the world could have saved me

He stared at Shiela, "Wouldn't it have been better for you to de How can you tell me that two men had...If you had not died earlier you should have died afterwards."

Shiela felt that a part of her consciousness was ready to fight against such allegations. She got very angry and said, "Stop talking nonsense Who are you to tell me all this? If two men attack you tomorrow, break your bones, gouge out one eye or cut off your nose, I will say all the you have just said to me...Shows how chivalrous you are...how much you care for your wife. Go and get me the heads of those men."

He shuddered. What was Shiela saying? How could be cut of someone's head? He was scared at the sight of blood. That is why he had stopped eating meat. He felt like vomiting.

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"How can I do that? These are not the days of the Raj..." he stopped himself. True, these were not the days of chivalry when he could chop off someone's head. Why then did he ask Shiela to kill herself "I can report the matter to the police. Give me the number of the bus."

Shiela seemed to taunt him, "What will you report...two men had." He snapped at her, "How can I say that?"

Shiela's voice had a depth to it now, "Then what else will you set Only this that two men teased my wife. You cannot even bring yoursel to say it and are asking me to kill myself!"

"Who wants to kill you?" He went on in a mechanical way, "Be this kind of existence full of humiliation..."

"What is so humiliating about it?" Shiela said. "If I had volunted let all this take place, you could have called me immoral, but the circumstances in the let all this take place, you could have called me immoral, but the circumstances in which all this happened was beyond my control at you cannot malign my character. So why should I die when I have down nothing wrong? I nothing wrong? I refuse to. I am going to live it down. Let us talk about it to appear He did not realize when he had started behaving in such a manufacture. talk about it to anyone."

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Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "Oh, I feel so ashamed! I am not fit to show my face to anyone. How can I face anyone now!"

Shiela stared at him and said in a reprimanding voice, "Why, what's wrong with you? You have not been raped. I am the one who has gone through it all. What has your face to do with it?"

He was annoyed at being scolded like this. He gnashed his teeth angrily and said, "Shut up. Any other woman in your place would have banged her head against the wall and killed herself! All you can do is joke about it."

"See, I am not happy with whatever happened to me." She said in a cold voice. "But I was not at fault at all. So I don't feel any remorse and certainly don't want to die just for this. I refuse to die...The rest is up to you. If you feel like it, you can track down those persons and kill them, or lodge a report with the police. If you can't do any of this, you can separate your self from me..."

"I don't need your directions." He felt down and out. Shiela always did this to him. She never admitted her faults, on top of that she bossed over him. "You think we can remain together even after this! You expect me to live with you! Everyone will point a finger at me and say—this is he man whose wife was raped by a conductor and a driver. Our relationship snapped the moment you told me all about it. There is nothing between us. You cannot remain in my house anymore!"

Shiela looked at him, he was really very angry. Maybe he was so angry that he could push her out of the house. Maybe he had nothing against those two men. Shiela was the target of all his anger. She felt like laughing but she restrained herself and said in a calm voice, "All right there is nothing between you and me. I will not remain in your house. The only concession I can offer you is that if you cannot take your belongings right now, you can collect them tomorrow morning. I wonder if you remember that the flat has been allotted to me and not to you."

He started. He had never realized that the conversation would take such a turn. He had never bothered about it. It would have been better if he had. The flat had been allotted to Shiela, naturally she would remain there. The best he could do was to collect all his belongings and go away. But go where? On the road? On the railway platform? He was not foolhardy to believe that he would manage to get two small rooms on rent even if he paid his entire salary. Since he did not have a government job like her, he could not think of a government glat...where could he go? To some hotel? To a friend's house? But till when?

He did not say anything. He paced the room breathing hard, from one end of the room to the other. In a short while, his breathing became normal and his pace slowed down. Could he just laugh and say to het "Let's stop all this nonsense and go to bed."

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But something within him did not let him laugh. He went and stood in front of Shiela, "I will take my things and go away tomorrow," His nostrils flared a bit, "Listen to me for once and all, you cannot get away with this sort of blackmail. This way you will blackmail me if I don't report at the maintenance office that the flush is not working or even if I don't kill the mouse hiding in the larder. You will continue to blackmail me even if you go around with another man."

Shiela felt a split within her. One part of her wanted to make up with her husband. She knew that her husband was experiencing a similar conflict...and one half of him was fighting in a superficial manner...50 that the other person would make up...

Suddenly she started crying, "I am so unhappy. Even if we compromise today, what about the future. Tomorrow we might have children. When they get to know what their mother had to go through, won't they commit suicide! Oh God, look at the things my husband and children have to go through just because of me..."

He felt himself relenting. This was the first time Shiela had taken it all on herself. She was behaving in a humble manner for the first time. He noticed that she was looking down, weeping continuously.

He came up to her and started consoling, "Go to bed now It is quite late. You have shown yourself to be a great Indian woman. People will be inspired by you...how you fought those two bestial men single handed, unarmed. Anyway go to bed. You must be tired after the days work. Tomorrow is a working day as well."

Shiela looked up, wiped her eyes and said, "All right, I will go " bed. But promise me you will not go away with your things tomorrow morning."

"We will talk about it later. Go to bed now." He said. "If you look at yourself in the mirror you will see, how worn out you look."

Shiela tried to smile faintly and said in a coaxing manner, "No Fig. promise me that you will not go away tomorrow morning. Otherwise I'll not be able to sleep a wink worrying about how I will have to manage all by myself in this flat."

"Yes. You get scared very easily!" He agreed to what Shiela had said right. I show the "All right, I shan't go. You will be miserable all by yourself. How you fight the core all l you fight the case all by yourself?"

Shiela looked at him sideways. He was still talking about the cast

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Maybe his ego had still not got reconciled to the situation. "Shall we go to bed then?" she asked.

"Yes, let's go. I am also feeling sleepy." He said and went and lay down on his side of the bed.

Translated from Hindi by Purabi Panwar



Narendra Kohli / 91

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It so happens that whenever I get down to fixing my own photographs in my photoalbum some other faces surreptitiously plant themselves on my face. Not that they are unknown faces—in fact they are actually my friends' and relatives faces. Time worn, innocent faces, with soft and well-defined contours. But their silence leaps up to me like a scream, hornby jangling my nerves. I gather the pieces bit by bit, to evolve them into a complete whole. But the place is so windy that the pieces scatter away eluding my grasp. I feel like an unfortunate man who has lost his break while running. But the tree under which he sits down to regain his break is shadowless and bare, insects having burrowed into its roots.

I don't know how many births I'll have to pass through to read myself. How many screams I'll have to hear enroute. Oh, how paint it is to put together waywird bits of life, birth after birth.

The face I feel for more intensely is my mother's face, covering my own face—a disintegrated, sickly face, almost a total wreck. I can discern signs of tiredness in every vein of her face, as if she is getting ready to depart from this moment any moment.

Even so, I am continuing with her treatment, even though I really the futility of it. I have availed the services of all the doctors and had of the locality for her treatment and there has been no let up in the efforts. I spend thirty to forty rupees on her medicines, apart in substantial amounts on fruit and wholesome diet for her. Oh, no, in not bragging or taking some undue credit for it. It is my duty to her. Every day I do three hours overtime, tell a score of lies, hunter a fact cock from whom I can filch money. I have to do all this perform out of sheer necessity as it were, you know. These days how maintain a family on three hundred rupees a month? Of course, month is fully aware of it. Last month when I had an unexpected winds.

of three hundred rupees to boot, I bought wearing apparel for all, sweets and toys for the children. Everybody felt so happy. The next day mother visited Karam Ali's shrine and made a votive offering at it. Maybe, for all I know, she might have also prayed for my prosperity. A mother is prepared to do anything for her children in all earnestness, even if it is a bad cause.

Once mother told an ideal story, befitting our hallowed tradition. It was about a son who while departing on his journey found that his mother had sewn in his sleeve under the armpit a hundred dinars and given him the parting advice that he should never speak a lie come what may. It was because of this truth that brigands who had waylaid him on the way had relented.

If my mother had acted on this advice, I am sure, she would have died the very third day of a bout of coughing. I knew her constant coughing forebode her death. She coughed and coughed and this is all that she was capable of and nothing else. She had become so irritable that she would lose her temper over nothing. But it is in man's nature to cling to life till his last breath. Is there anybody in the world who descends in the grave with a happy glow on his face? While she was lying a lingering death I served mother devoutly. Hadn't she nurtured me with her milk for three years. In deference to that I have also been keeping her on medicines for the last twelve years without a frown on my face. Oh, no, I'm not equating medicines with milk. No, not by a long shot. But how explain? One does not get a decorative medal for nothing. One gets it only for some meritorious act of devotion and such like traits. To be credited as a good man one has to kill umpteenth desires and pass through so many slaughter houses.

The other day when I went to the chemist's shop to buy medicines for mother, by mistake I stepped into the adjoining wine shop. I kept looking temptingly at the tantalising coloured wine bottles. When I handed the medical prescription to the man at the counter she gave me a sneering look. "The next shop. Go to the next shop," he said raising an accusing finger.

It was only then that I realised my mistake retraced my steps feeling out.

That night I could not sleep well and kept getting bizarre and outlandish dreams. I found myself wandering in a desolate desert my throat parched with thirst. I was running around like an animal, my tongue hanging out from my mouth. Then I saw a fountain ahead of me and inking into the sand up to my knees. And I kept sinking into it, down and down.

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et up in mi apart from Oh, no, lie duty towns ties, hunt for this perform now can on ourse, mother ourse, mother cted winds That night it dawned upon me for the first time what a disturbing element mother's cough was for my sleep, how egregiously it could rake up my sleep! All the same I have continued with her treatment. I am not an undutiful son. I have decided, even if I have to sell all my assets, including myself, I will keep on treating her, till her last breath. Everybody loves one's mother and so do I. Love is perhaps man's last resort.

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There is another face imprinted alongside mother's face. Sad, exhausted, dented. It is my late father's face. Now he does not exist in this world. Illness? No, he had no illness. He drank himself to death. In his last days he had started drinking so heavily that even his sweat smelled of alcohol. But I consider my father a great man, because like all great men he was unhappy with his wife. I mean, my mother. Perhaps it was to drown his unhappiness that he took to drinking. I remember in the course of a squabble with Mother he had said, "I get more peace in Usha's kotha than in your house." Mother was furious. She kept abusing and cursing father the whole day. Even the hearth was not lit that day. Father took me to a hotel to eat.

When father was on deathbed they tried to pour some drops of holy water in his mouth. But he refused. "Pour some drops of liquor in my mouth instead," he said. I wanted to give him two spoonfuls of whisky but the elders present there rebuked me and pushed me aside.

On the third day of his death to bring peace to father's soul, five faquirs were ceremoniously served a rich repast, father's favourite dishes being the main items of the menu. The food was served in brand new hitherto un-used utensils and additionally the faquirs were given six yards of cloth each to make kurta-pajamas from so that father would have full benefit of this pious act in the upper world.

I watched the goings-on in silence while the faquirs recited the kalma, while patting their bulging stomachs. When they came out, six yard long pieces of cloth tucked under their arms I waylaid them and holding a ten-rupee note before each of them said in a meek voice, "Shahsaheh my father was very fond of good food and along with it of good wine. Here, take this small amount and down one peg. This was my father's last wish."

This had greatly angered the faquirs and they had fulminated against my unbecoming behaviour. In his lifetime father had earned a huge lot of money and threw it away most recklessly as if he had earned it on horse racing and the satta market, for me he had left me the legacy of a tumble-down, permanent illnesses and a debt of twelve thousand rupees. My creditors pestered me, cajoled me, threatened me and in the end gave up, thinking that they had lost the game and nothing would

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come of it. But the tumble-down house and a wrecked mother are still wery much with me.

Looking at it closely, we do not spend more than ten percent of our lives exclusively on ourselves. The rest ninety percent of our life is spent in fulfilling, others wishes as if we are indebted to them in a way or the other.

According to my mother as she often professed to me, it was her last desire to marry me off in her lifetime. Like a dutiful son, I bided by her wishes and got married. It is now almost eight years that I entered holy wedlock. But my wife still continues to make one demand after another demand on me. The source of her demands seems to be perennial; perhaps it may never end.

Here, have a look at my wife's picture. It was taken at the time when she came to our house as a bride. She looks harmless and docile like a cow. Doesn't she? You are right. But you have failed to look at her sharp horns. My good man, only one who wears the shoes knows where it pinches or where the nail hurts....Now she has become very fat and flabby—layer upon layer of fat. She hardly knows anything of the world outside the confines of her domestic life. How nice of a woman to remain domesticated. It is so comforting. Remain tied to the daily routine with straightjacketed rigidity. Get up in the morning, blunder into making something which passes for food, find some cause to blame it on mother-in-law, be fussy with the children and as the night comes entrust her perspiring body to me, her hubby, and then turn on her side and fall into deep slumber. Lo and behold, one more staid, stale and eventless day of life comes to a close.

In the beginning I did feel perturbed at her womanish innanities and crass ignorance. But then I got accustomed to it. Now take the same pleasure in cowing her down as a rider takes in reining in a restive horse. Like every woman she also has a weakness for jewellery and fine attire. It is I who has to atone for it. The forty gram mangalsutra that you see round her neck, oh, what intense humiliation I had to undergo to obtain it for her. I wagged my tail like dog before the boss to shake the pagoda tree. I manouvered for the chair which yielded clandestine money. For this, I had to buy Gupta's enmity who was the main contender for this post which I got out of turn. I even jumped for a measly amount that my wife's greed got blunted after getting the mangalsutra. Not at wife is very faithful to me. It should not be difficult to think why. A woman who has become flabby and ungainly and has lost the art of

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enticing other males, what else can she do if not remain faithful to her hubby?

As I have told you love and fidelity are a man's last resort.

My wife is madly in love with two things—jewellry and Billu

Billu is our seven-year old son. People think he is very beautiful.

No, he has not taken after me. His complexion is fair and he has blue
eyes. I am not handsome by any means. Far from it. My wife thinks
that when Billu grows up he will resemble Richard Burton. Oh, no, my
wife has nothing to do with Richard Burton. Look at him and look
at her. I had only taken her to see Backett when Billu was in her womb.
She adored Richard Burton. I also remember that during that night she
clung to me and kept kissing me passionately.

Billu is now seven years old. But even now she makes him sit in her lap and put food in her mouth. She asks him to sleep by her side. Sometimes she kisses him and hugs him so intensely that I begin to feel jealous of him. After Beckett I did not take her to see any other Richard Burton film. She often tell me that one day Billu will emerge as a great actor. I just keep mum. In my childhood my mother also used to see the dream of my becoming a doctor. What else can a man do except see dreams? It comes so easily to him.

Like other wives, nay wife also hates her in-laws family. Particularly, my uncle and his progeny. After father's death, these persons who are standing around me in the picture, I mean, uncle and his three sons entered into litigation against me for father's delapidated house. Once he had even roughed me up by goondas. But relationships never get sundered Relationship is a burden of life which man carries on his back all his life. He may take of the burden at some turning of life to pause for rest. But he has again to load the burden on his back and march on till he reaches the mouth of his grave.

Next to my family members, my wife dislikes my friends. But on the contrary, I like my friends immensely. A man can live without a wife and family members. But even for a moment can you conceive living without friends? At least not I.

These people who are standing around me in the picture are very good friends of mine. But I know some of them have tagged them on to me because they want to get something out of me. Same is the case with me. I also keep clinging to some friends with some dormand or ulterior purpose in mind. If you look at it closely, every friendship is based on some personal motive. Perhaps even friendship by itself is one of the innumerable necessities of life—mother, father, wife, brother, relatives, friends—so many shadows are hovering around me. I have

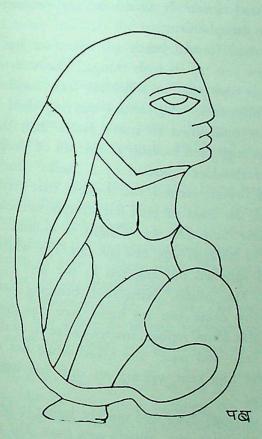
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become mirror in which so many reflections inter-mix and get blurred. In this crowd of shadows I go in quest of finding my own being and identity. This quest is so futile and tiring that I feel completely drained out. I am a devoted son, a faithful husband, a loving father, a brother, a friend. What I am, I am in relation to others. But I'm nothing by myself.

Sometimes I feel that my life is like a book of which I am only a title. I ransack the pages of the book but I don't find a word relating

to the title.

Translated from Urdu by Jai Ratan



Salaam Bin Razzaq / 97

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Sailing in the Same Boat

Shaani

I irti could not sit still. For the umpteenth time she got up from the bench and started pacing. Was it her imagination or did the hoot from the train sound closer? It would be any moment now that the train would reach the platform....

The anxiety had formed beads of sweat on her brow. "This is what happens when you try to rush things," she was telling herself as she reached for her sari pallu to wipe her face. Suddenly there was a rush of people followed by the coolies carrying their luggage causing total chaos as everybody tried to move faster than the others.

Kirti was so engrossed looking at the sea of people, that the feel of a hand on her shoulder followed by a "hello" made her jump out of her skin. For a fleeting second, she thought that maybe it was Rajjan, but as she turned, she tried to hide her disappointment when she saw Mrs. Mittal standing there. She was a sight to behold. Her ample body somehow stuffed in the light blue, raw silk sari. The whiff of the imported perfume she had splashed on, lingered in the air.

"Oh! Hello Mrs. Mittal," Kirti said, bringing her hands together in a greeting, "How come you are here? Are you going somewhere?"

"Bhopal," Mrs. Mittal replied, matter-of-factly, as if going to Bhopal was routine for her, "and you?" she asked while her eyes kept darting towards the coolie who kept walking on with her luggage towards the train compartment

"Rajjan is coming!" Kirti said quickly, trying to hide the expression of utter ridicule on seeing Mrs. Mittal's new look. The thought of Rajjan coming, had been nagging her for a while, but Kirti now focused her attention on Mrs. Mittal, especially when after so many years she stood there in all her finery and talking about going to Bhopal.

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"Really?" exclaimed Mrs. Mittal, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, "By this train?"

"Yes"

"Has it not been a few days since Rajjan landed in India? I don't remember who was mentioning this...."

"He had to stop over in Delhi for a few days," Kirti cut her short, before Mrs. Mittal could come up with something unpleasant. At that very moment the train entered the platform with a loud roar. Mrs. Mittal parted with, "O.K then, we shall meet when I get back..." and in the entire hullabaloo caused by the trains' arrival, Kirti did not notice Mrs. Mittal moving on. Her anxiety had reached a crescendo—perspiration, dry throat, and the feeling as though she had swallowed a toad. It brought back memories of the day her results were to be declared and the way she had waited for the newspaper to be delivered. That day too she had reached the station in her impatience.

Should she stay where she was? Or should she just ignore the pushing and shoving and move towards the train? But seeing the sea of people, she decided to just wait where she was. As it is people kept banging into her, as she stood there.

"Will I be able to recognize Rajjan?" the same thought of the past few days crossed her mind again. "Will he be able to recognize me from a distance?" Seven years is a long time...during which a child attains youth, the young have moved towards adulthood and on to the old

She had chosen this spot very carefully. From here she could keep an eye on the people disembarking and also have the exit gate in sight.

Nothing seemed to ever change at the station, over the years. Be it any season, day or night, the locomotions of trains and people seemed like an endless stream of action. There were always people—surrounded with luggage and friends or family, either arriving from somewhere or teady to embark of a journey to far of place. The expressions on the faces of people who had come to receive someone or the other, also varied. On some faces one could see elation and excitement, whereas on some others...

"RAJJAN!" Kirti let out a scream as she leapt towards the first class compartment, but the very next moment she looked away, embattassed. The young man who just got off did look familiar, she convinced hetself. Looking around, she found she was sure she spotted Rajjan this time, till be tine, till he went up to the girl standing next to a vendor. Scanning the crowd the crowd once more, she nearly followed a few more people whom

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As she stood disappointed, watching the last of the passengers go, Kirti wondered if today too she would have to return alone. The thought sent shivers down her spine. Again face that look on papa's face, again hear mother's brooding, which brought tears to her eye's-again that tension...

"What happened?"

Mrs. Mittal had managed to spot Kirti through the crowd and again formed the question with her hands. She was curious to know if Rajjan had arrived.

Kirti stood still without saying a word and simply stared at Mrs. Mittal. Then when she could think of no answer, she simply raised her hand in a goodbye and started waving, as if she had come to see her off only.

Not just Kirti, but the entire household was reeling under the same tension. It had been on a Tuesday, about thirteen days back, when Rajjan was supposed to have landed in Mumbai. The restlessness of everybody was reaching an all time high.

"What's the time, Kirti?" Papa had asked her for the third time

"Four-o-clock!"

"Only nine hours left," Papa said, staring a spot on the wall, but seeing nothing. "Rajjan's plane will land at six-o-clock."

"So? He can't come and meet you immediately!" Mother said, exasperatedly, after papa had said the same thing for the seventh time in half hour intervals. Mother could not bear his impatience any more. Rajjan was landing in Mumbai, which was about seven hundred miles from his home. Even if he wanted, it was not geographically possible for him to cover that distance immediately. Papa was the first to wake up every morning, but that day he did not let anybody sleep. Mother, Kirti and Shobha—all were woken up early. He even reached the outhouse, walking as fast as he could with the support of his walking stick, to wake up Shyamlal.

The day began with, "Rajjan is coming today!" and was heard from every corner of the house, throughout the day, like a stuck record. When this fact had sunk in, husband and wife sat reminiscing—Rajjan's habits qualities and abilities were discussed at length. If this was not enough. Kirti could hear movement in her parents' room till very late at night. Sleep eluded them.

When Rajjan had left for England seven years back to pursue a diploma in engineering, nobody had anticipated it would take him this long to come back. He had said that he would be back in two, maybe two and a half years. He had been married for only six months at that

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time. It was decided that Ratna would go with him. It would be very lonely in a foreign country and she would be good company. Plus, she would be a moral support and help ease the tension so he could concentrate on his studies.

The two and a half years stretched to three, but Rajjan did not return. He did write once, informing them that he had picked up a temporary job. It would pay for their passage and they might even be able to save part of it....

Then came the news that even Ratna had got a job at a radio station there and together they were earning a good amount.

This created a new situation. Rajjan now seemed insecure about getting a job as good on his return. This was apparent through his letter. Initially his letters suggested his eagerness to come back, but not anymore.

Since Rajjan has left, there had been a series of unfortunate incidents. The brother, younger than Shobha had died. Kirti's older sister had moved to Banaras after her marriage. Papa had retired from his Government job and was sitting at home and worst of all was that over a period of time he had lost his eyesight.

"There could be none as unfortunate as me," Rajjan had written when he got the news, "that so much has happened and I could not be with you. I really am a wretched soul or may be I am getting punished for the misdeeds of my previous life, that I can't be with you at a time like this and I am here thousands of miles away from you...but papa you need not worry—in a day or two I will be consulting an eye specialist here and I am sure that the day I get you here everything will be all right."

As the letter was read to him, papa could not hold back his tears. He took the letter from Kirti and let his fingers roam over it as if trying to feel the words. Choking with tears, he turned to mother and said, "I swear by god! Now I am not bothered about my eyes anymore." And that day, the entire household sat surrounding papa. Kirti, Shobha and Mother sat while papa once again narrated stories and anecdotes of his workplace.

Kirti hesitated as she reached the gate.

This had been happening for the past three to four days. Kirti walked back from the station and managed to cover the distance fairly quickly. But somehow, her steps seemed to falter as she approached her

This was not new to her, but she had not felt this helpless before. The other days might have been an illusion, but today the situation seemed different. D different. Even though baseless, but she had a strong feeling that she

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would find Rajjan sitting with papa when she entered. There was strong possibility that she had missed him in the crowded station or may be he had not recognized her and come straight home.

Dusk had enveloped the houses in darkness and there was a nip in the air. The lights from one or two houses seemed to be staring at the dark and uninhabited corners of the lane. Kirti's own house was dimly lit and it appeared mysterious, almost haunted, even to her. Rajjan has come after so many years, if we don't light up the house now, then when will we? How come Shyamlal is here at this hour? She wondered where he was rushing off to on his bicycle? These were the thoughts crossing her mind as she opened the gate.

Kirti's heart started beating faster. Taking long strides, she quickly crossed the garden and verandah and reached inside. But there was nobody. There were no suitcases or hold alls, nor was there any attaché case with tags of any airline—just the dimly lit, palatial house, where three-four people could easily get lost.

"Kirti!"

She stopped short when she heard her mother call out her name from the far end of the darkened corridor. Her voice sounded eerie and she herself appeared ghostlike standing there.

"Who is it?" papa asked at that instant. "Has Kirti come?"
"Yes, Kirti is back," mother said after a moments silence, during which she glanced towards Kirti and moved on.

That's it! Nobody said a word after that. It was as though nobody had been waiting for her nor did they have any expectations.

For the past twelve days, everybody had been waiting with bated breath at this hour, waiting for Kirti. In fact the first two days papa himself had come along to the station. He had scanned many trains coming from Mumbai. It was only later that they came to know that instead of coming home, Rajjan had gone straight to Delhi—to Ratna's house In spite of re-scheduling the program many times, there was no news of Rajjan even on the thirteenth day.

Kirti reached her room and for a long time she thought mother would yet again tiptoe to her room and whisper, "Kirti, please go and send a telegram to Rajjan...he has made a joke of everything. It's fine if he was not coming here. Why did he have to write so many letters and make everybody wait?"

.... But mother didn't come...not even to announce dinner. She had sent Shobha instead.

"I met Mrs. Mittal today!"

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Kirti said to start a conversation and relieve the tension at the dinner

"Where?" mother asked, showing no interest, whatsoever. table.

"At the station."

"Oh!" mother responded, indifferently.

"She was on her way to Bhopal," saying this Kirti looked at her mother. She saw the reaction she had been expecting. To hear Mrs. Mittal's name and Bhopal mentioned in the same breath caught her off guard. Her hand stopped mid-air with the bite she was about to take. "Who gave you this information?" she asked in amazement.

"Mrs. Mittal herself."

Mother stared at Kirti in silence, letting it all sink in. A funny expression crossed her eyes. Kirti could not make out if it was happiness or utter shock. After a moment she diverted her attention from Kirti to some dark corner of the room. She then simply shrugged, as if to say it was bound to happen, and resumed eating.

For someone who had seen a very determined side of Mrs. Mittal, it was very difficult for them to believe that she had simply given up and returned to the same point for which she had been protesting for all these years.

Mrs. Mittal did not fit the category of an ideal neighbour. For one, her house was located far away and secondly, she always appeared aloof and arrogant. Maybe this was the reason people never really bothered to get to know her. But when Kirti met her, the two of them got along well. It put an end to the mysteriousness surrounding her since her arrival. She had created a certain curiosity among the town folk. They often wondered how a married lady had shifted alone to a new town and also picked up a job there. It was not as if she had any relatives here or even someone she knew. She was living in a rented room and was never seen mixing with others. This was enough to set tongues wagging. People wondered—how could a young woman live alone in a new town? If Mrs. Mittal was really married, how come her husband never visited? Why had she never gone to him in the past three years?

"Why should people be so inquisitive about other people's lives?" Mrs. Mittal posed this question to Kirti on just their second meeting. "Do I need to go about telling everyone that I am married....that there had been a lot of love between us....how Mahesh had suddenly started theating. cheating on me and how I am living alone and still fighting with him over this?"

That day Kirti realized that there were still people in this world who could face any hardship but had not learnt to bend or compromise.

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Within two years of their love marriage, Mahesh got involved in an affair Any self-respecting woman would have done what Mrs. Mittal had done

Kirti sensed her mother was also thinking about that particular day when Mrs. Mittal had dropped by after Shobha's birthday party. Mother suddenly got up and went to the other room and came back with her arms laden with some old and expensive clothes. She spread them in front of Mrs. Mittal and asked, "Do you know how to mend clothes,"

Mrs. Mittal laughed and answered in the negative.

"These were given to me on my marriage," mother said, "and some might be even older. I take them out of the trunk once in a while to air them. It saddens me if any of them have developed a tear So I simply mend them and put them right back. I can't wear such clothes at my age and the girls laugh at the thought of being seen in them."

Mrs. Mittal picked up one sari at a time and admired the intricate

gold and silver work woven on them.

"When are you going to Bhopal?" mother asked suddenly and without warning. Kirti saw the blood drain from Mrs. Mittal's face but she managed to compose herself and answered, "There is no such program as of now...why?"

"What do you mean why?" mother retorted. "Your husband is not the only one in this world who is having an affair. For how long do you think you can fight alone? When you have something precious and you truly love it, it is very difficult to give it up. Look at me..."

Using the old saris as an example, mother came up with some more worldly matters, all of them pointed in one direction. When Mrs Mittal could take it no more, she got up and left the room. From where Kirti was sitting, she could see Mrs. Mittal wiping her tears, before she came back to the room. There was anger and humiliation written all over her face. For a long moment, she did not say a word. Kirti tried to console her using her mother's sermonizing tone, which seemed to anger Mrs. Mittal even more. To control herself, she plucked the flower she had pinned to her hair and started stroking the petals. She was deep in thought, as if weighing her words. Finally she pierced one petal and held it out and asked, "Can you mend this..."

Mother saw Kirti pull back her hand and quickly intervened, "Go

and have your dinner."

"Switch off the lights before going to bed," mother called out to Kirti as she left the room. "I don't want to be bothered later. And if Shobha insists, let her sleep with you."

There had been no mention of Rajjan. Not even a word. Many times that night, Kirti felt as though mother had come into

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her room. Kirti had woken with a start, but there was no one there. her room. In the silence, she kept hearing her parents tossing and turning restlessly, all through the night.

For the last thirteen days, everybody had been in a festive mood, waiting for Rajjan. The irony was that when he did come, there was no one to receive him at the door. It was three in the morning and the entire household was fast asleep. When Kirti went to papa's room to inform him, he woke up with a start, arms flailing, trying to look for his walking stick. He then stood up and opened his arms wide.

Rajjan stepped forward and touched his feet. Ratna followed close

behind.

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"You really made us wait," mother wanted to say when her blessings were sought-"if only you knew what we have been going through for the past so many days," but she could not bring herself to voice her thoughts. Nobody said anything. Shobha came in at that moment and the noise of the re-union could have easily woken up even the neighbours.

"Shobha! Just look how you have grown!"

"Did you expect her to remain the same?" mother said.

"Ratna, do you remember," Rajjan was saying, "she was so small when we left. And just look at Kirti. She has turned into a lady."

"Don't forget, I have completed my M.A." Kirti said. "Also, I have become a lecturer and that I am now earning as much as you. Rajjan, when you go back to England, take me with you."

"O.k.! O.k.!!" Rajjan teased.

In all this excitement, only Kirti noticed her father, how his raised arms just fell to his sides.

"Look, I have brought so many presents for everyone!" Rajjan said as he got up to open his luggage and eagerly spread out the gifts. Mother's suggestion that it could be done in the morning, fell on deaf ears—a cardigan for papa, games and toys for Shobha and sweaters and scarves for Kirti-Nalini!

Ratna kept mentioning that they had scoured so many shops throughout London and picked up each piece very carefully.

Papa looked at everyone through blind eyes, feeling like a stranger within his own family.

The day dawned, and everything was just like it used to be so many years back. News travelled that Rajjan had come and people started coming in hordes to meet him—papa's friends, women known to mother, kirti and contract of Rajjan's Kirti and Shobha's friends and the largest number was that of Rajjan's thildhood and school-going friends.

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"Now spending time with you is pointless" papa's companion of years said. Papa reacted with a shocked, "Why?"

"How long do you think you are here?" Papa's other friend, Saxena asked. "Just a few more days, right? Rajjan is here to take you with

him. And he is not going to take no for an answer."

"Oh! That...." papa sighed with relief and laughed. "Lets see what happens. He has been trying to persuade me for a long time, but I have not agreed as yet. Sometimes I feel I should go, but then lose courage I have not consulted any doctor here for this reason...but if you ask me truthfully, Sharmaji, the thought of leaving my homeland fills me with dread."

"It's not as if you are going forever!" Sharmaji said. "Come back when treatment is over."

Papa was lost in thought, as if deciding there and then whether he should go with Rajjan or not. It was apparent that Sharmaji, Saxena and all others thought that the sole purpose of Rajjan's visit was to take his father along. And why shouldn't they? Not only his wife and kids, but he himself had been telling people this. Nobody knew the truth, and whenever it croosed his mind made father very restless. There was just one thought nagging him, like a slippery snake slithering on a mosscovered wall---what if Rajjan had forgotten his promise? Since his arrival, he seemed to have just completed formality by asking about his eyes...nothing else was mentioned. He just needs to relax after such a long journey and then he will surely ask...he thought.

At night, mother asked him to have his dinner, "Rajjan and Rausa

have gone out and I don't think they will be back soon."

"I will still wait," papa said. "If Kirti and Shobha are hungry, let

But nobody was hungry. Like the night before, they all waited for Rajjan and Ratna till late. When tired of waiting, Shobha went off to sleep...hungry.

Parties and movies...

Barring the first afternoon, Rajjan's consecutive days were mostly spent either attending parties, or watching movies. He had no time even to catch a breath and was beginning to feel he had made a mistake coming home. The list of his friends and other acquaintances wanting to meet him was almost unending. If he tried to turn down an invitation, he was baggered with complaints.

"Rajjan was talking about leaving for London," Kirti overheard

her mother telling papa.

"Whose going with him?" father asked expectantly. "Me?"

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"No," mother said softly, as she looked away. "He was just talking about himself. He mentioned something about having to spend a couple of days more in Delhi as some work had come up. That means he will have to cut his visit short."

Father was quiet for a long time.

"What about their trip to Banaras to meet Nalini?"

"They are not going there now."

"Why?"

"They don't have the time," mother said. "They even cancelled their trip to Jaipur to meet his maternal uncle. Ratna was saying that we should send their presents by courier. He has come after so many years and returning without even meeting his sister. Just imagine how Nalini will feel!"

Papa was quiet once again.

"Did Rajjan say anything else?"

"About what?" mother asked, looking at papa. Seeing his expression, she quickly checked herself and added, "He has no time to even sit with me for a while. But yesterday he did ask if you had liked the coat."

Kirti heard the bed creak and knew that her father was restless again.

Coming out of the station, Kirti breathed a sigh of relief. She felt the tension of so many days finally ebb away. It was funny, though, that seeing off Rajjan and Ratna had not saddened her. On the contrary, she felt light. It was more like a person of a low status would feel on seeing off some guests of a higher status.

Before leaving, Rajjan and Ratna bid farewell, but the way things had turned out, Kirti felt their words of endearment were hollow and she just could not get herself to reciprocate. She wished she could do what Rajjan had asked her. Many times she had even prepared herself to start the topic with Ratna, but her conscience would not allow it and she was rendered helpless.

While waiting for the train, Rajjan took Kirti aside on some pretext and said, "I need a small favour from you."

"In all honesty, you are the only person I can talk to. Not just because you are my sister, but also because you are a mature and intelligent person... what's wrong with mother and father? We came after so many years and it didn't feel as if anybody was happy about our home coming. Papa mostly had unpleasant things to say and mother was always grim.

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very hurt. She said that nobody even appreciated the presents, which we got with so much love. Papa, for example, didn't even touch the coat. Could you somehow convince her that her feelings are baseless and everybody really liked the presents..."

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Kirti knew Rajjan was not asking for much, but she still could not get herself to comply, "What's the matter with me?" she thought Even though it would be a lie, could she not molly coddle Ratna...

"So? What else did she tell you?" Rama Sen asked, placing her hand on Kirti's shoulder. Kirti was jolted out of her daydream and was somewhat upset with herself. How could she have forgotten all about Rama Sen travelling with her? Since they were going in the same direction, they thought of sharing a taxi. And whom was she asking about? Kirti wondered and then answered herself-Oh! Yes, Mrs. Mittal! They had been talking about her since they left the station. Whether you liked it or not, whether the place was appropriate or not, the conversations always revolved around Mrs. Mittal.

"She said she would be back in three to four days."

"She said the same thing to me," Rama Sen said, "but I knew from the start that she is not going to come back and one day just send her resignation letter. As far as I know, Kirti, the fact is that when you love someone so dearly, it is very difficult to hate that person even if he has hurt you. When I saw an educated woman like Mrs. Mittal get upset over a bad omen like the breaking of her bangles, I knew her resolve was broken."

Kirti was getting bored. Right now she had no interest whatsoever, in Mrs. Mittal. She stuck her head out of the taxi window and wondered how much longer it would take to reach home. She was getting ired of Rama Sen's non-stop talking.

Fear engulfed her again as she approached her house.

Her steps did not falter today as she entered the gate—but a familiar feeling of fear, which had been dormant until now, began to resurface The same darkness surrounding the houses, the lights peeping from one or two houses, the silent and uninhabited corners of the lane...and her very dimly lit house.

Sneaking unto the verandah like a thief, Kirti remembered that tonight even Shobha would not be home. She had left with their maternal aunt, who had come to meet Rajjan and Ratna. The house felt even emptier and she could very well imagine the scene inside. Father had not even come to the door to bid farewell to Rajjan so it was pointles to expect he would to expect he would get up from his bed.... And mother? She would have chosen a dark corner of the house to lie down.

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Kirti was tired. In a way it was good Shobha was not at home.

All she wanted now was to avoid confronting her parents and just run
to her room to crash on the bed. She managed to cross the corridor
but stopped short when she saw the lights on in her father's room.

She hesitated and stopped just at the door.

"Who is it?" papa called out at that moment.

Kirti didn't want her presence known. She stood against the wall, very quiet.

Mother looked towards the door and seeing or hearing nothing, replied, "There is no one there,"

"I thought maybe Kirti had returned."

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maternal felt even ther had pointless are would Hearing this, Kirti could not stop herself. She did not care if it was immoral; she just wanted to peep into their room while passing by. Doing so, she stopped in her tracks, dumbfounded by what she saw—papa was wearing the same coat, which he had not even touched in Rajjan's presence. In front of him stood mother, wearing her cardigan. Papa had his hand on her shoulder and his fingers were running to feeling the texture of the cardigan and he was asking, "What colour is it? Blue?"

Translated from Hindi by Amrit Sidhu

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Militants

Sudarshan Ratanpuri

Sitting on the platform of the big banyan tree in the bazaar, Kastun Swas lost in thought. She had been there for a long time and was worried as to why nobody had turned up to buy her load of firewood. One or two men had passed that way, enquired the price and moved on. She had called to them, "How much will you pay?" But they had paid no heed and had gone ahead without giving a reply.

As time passed, she grew anxious. She looked up towards the sky. The sun had moved westward. She, a woman, was quite some distance away from her village and she would have to trudge the distance through deserted wilderness. The thought made her nervous. She decided to sell her load at whatever price she got and rush homeward hastily.

There were very few people in the bazaar today. She asked a man who passed that way, "Brother, what's the matter? Today the whole bazaar appears emptied."

"You don't know?" The man looked hard at Kasturi.

"No! I don't know. Please, tell me. I came here from the village a little before noon with this load of firewood."

"That's why. How would you know?" said the man, shaking his head.

"Please tell me what happened here." Kasturi asked anxiously. "Pray tell me why the bazaar looks so deserted," Kasturi asked again.

"What could've happened?" The man took a long breath and said, "Times are bad. One can't say anything. One comes out from his house but he does not know whether he will get back home or not."

Kasturi assented. "Where have those times gone when one could go anywhere anytime without any fear? But today!" Kasturi stopped for a while and then said, "But what has happened here that the gaiety and busy hum of shoppers have disappeared?"

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of telli for two Bhathors The man heaved a cold sigh and said, "There was a bomb explosion in Sabzi Mandi this morning, killing some people and wounding many more. This incident has created a scare in the whole city and people have shut themselves in their homes and the whole city looks bereft of the strict."

"I see," nodded Kasturi, "such a thing never happened earlier. Always, the moment I put my load of firewood on this platform, people came

up in a line. And today?"

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ed for ty and "Who would've come today to take your firewood? Today people sitting in their homes are wondering what next." The man stopped for a while and then added, "Today human life has become so cheap. Killing a man is no more than killing a chicken."

"It seems so," replied Kasturi, "who would've done this? What sort of a man is he who is spilling human blood in lanes and bazaars?"

"Who else? Only some people from across the line of control who have no respect for their religion. Greed for money is turning these people into militants and making them play with the lives of human beings." Saying this, the man walked away.

Kasturi kept standing there and wondering, thinking of this and that. She was thinking that if there had been some forewarning of what was going to happen, such a thing would not have taken place. But now what should she do. What can be done. I cannot leave this load of firewood here and I don't know anyone or any place in the city where I can spend the night.

She started feeling vexed, annoyed with herself. Why did I quarrel with Bhikkhu? What use was it? You need a child, a tiny prattler in the house. At one time I myself had thought of getting my own younger sister married to Bhikkhu. I could not. She could bring some liveliness in the family. I was still thinking about it when I came to know Bhikkhu had established relationship with Taro. This information struck my heart like an arrow. I was his married wife and he did not consider it necessary to consult me about it. My need for a baby was as great as his. Not a whisper of it from him and he quietly went ahead and married Taro. This was something that rankled in my heart and it created tension and disquiet and wrangling between me and Bhikkhu.

And one day Bhikkhu told me, "Kasturi, you can remain in this house and have your two bhathoras' quietly, but don't create fuss in the

"It is you who have created all the fuss. Are you not ashamed of telling me off?" I had shot back. After a pause I had added, "As bhathoras, I can earn them by selling firewood. But remember, bried leavened chapatris

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if you bring my co-wife Taro in this house, it will be the end of our relationship."

Bhikkhu did not care and brought Taro to live in the house. Bhikkhu tried his best to assuage her feelings. He said, "Look, we have been married for ten long years and you have not produced a baby. You may not want to have one, but I want someone to call me Bapu. There should be a heir to our lands and property."

Kasturi did not heed his advice, his pleadings. Every day she went to the forest, collected firewood, bundled it and carried the bundle to the city market. Thus she started meeting her own expenses with what she earned. It had gone on for some time like this.

Her reverie was suddenly broken when someone said, "How much for this firewood?"

"Whatever you please," she replied. Now it was a matter of getting a load off her head. She took what was given to her and tied the amount in a corner of her *dupatta*. Then she started worrying as to how she would get home. The sun was gathering up its glare from the top of trees and announcing the arrival of the night. She looked around and spotted the Sarpanch of her village at some distance, coming towards her. She felt relieved. She ran up to the Sarpanch and said, "Sarpanchii, I bow to you."

"Be happy." Then casting his look all around, he asked Kasturi, "What are you doing here at this time? It is evening and soon it will be night."

Kasturi told her tale to the Sarpanch with tears in her eyes. Listening to her narration, the Sarpanch's eyes got riveted on Kasturi's bosom, visible through her torn shirt.

"Don't worry. I myself have to go to the village. You may come with me." Then after a pause, "I've some work with the Tehsildar. I'll be back after finishing it."

After talking to the Sarpanch, Kasturi's face had brightened. She kept standing there, waiting for him. She had no fear in her mind now. Being with the Sarpanch, she felt safe enough. Slowly, dusk was turning into dark, but she was not worried about gathering darkness.

The Sarpanch came after some time and both of them took the path that led to the village. After covering some distance, the Sarpanch left the beaten path and entered the untrodden tract along the dry stream with some clumps of trees on its bank.

Kasturi was surprised a bit to see the Sarpanch going that was and asked, "Sarpanchji, why are you moving away from the beaten path, to walk on the untrodden ground?"

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The Sarpanch replied, "Kasturi, you don't know that some militants have infiltrated into this area, you never know when one of them lurking around may emerge from somewhere. These clumps will come handy to hide and save our lives. Someone can see us on the beaten track from a distance, but who will notice us in this untrodden ground? We'll be taken for only shadows of some trees," said the Sarpanch, "you understand?"

After remaining silent for a while, he added, "If there is sound of some movement, sit down behind a clump of trees immediately."

"Yes," nodded Kasturi and said, "you are right, Sarpanchji, I

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at way n path, Both of them continued to walk together, side by side. After they had gone some distance, they heard the sound of some movement.

The Sarpanch said, "Kasturi, come here behind this grove. Who knows, there may be some militant around."

Frightened, Kasturi stood behind a clump. Both of them were standing close to each other. Their breaths fell on each other's face. The Sarpanch extended his arm and enfolded Kasturi. Kasturi tried hard to release herself, but she couldn't do a thing and then...

The next day, the whole village was talking about Kasturi, returning from the city, having been waylaid and killed by militants.

Translated from Dogri by Shivanath

Sudarshan Ratanpuri / 113

The Origin

Habib Kamran

It is an old story, familiar to every one.

Once upon a time a King of Kashmir was seated in his court, surrounded by courtiers, when the city Kotwal entered with his men. They had brought in two women and a child, whom they produced before the King. The Kotwal bowed deeply and began, "Great and Noble King! These two women were found fighting with each other over this child outside the Royal Palace. This child would have been torn in two for sure, pulled as he was by them both in opposite directions, or these witches themselves would have been stoned to death by the agitated mob, had I not arrested them at once and brought them before your Majesty. Each of them claims to be this child's mother; they are vehement in their protestations and refuse to yield their right over him. Your Royal

Majesty alone can settle the issue and restore the child to his real mother."

The King observed the women and the child and then looked at his minister. The minister asked one woman to state her case. Beating her chest, she cried, "Great and Omnipotent King! This Kotwal lies! He did not arrest us, we were coming ourselves to plead the case before our King, when he ran after us. I am Zoonmal and this is my son, my heart, the light of my eyes. I have given birth to him and he belongs to me!"

The King glanced at the other woman, and she too beat her chest and cried, "Oh Just King! I am Heemal. Zoonmal lies! This child is the strength of my limbs, a part of my body, my own flesh and blood, sprung from my womb! He only belongs to me and no one else.

The King asked Zoonmal whether she could produce a witness in her favour, and she replied, "My Majestic Lord! I am a shepherdess, who lives in a far meadow, where there are no neighbours, friends of

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relatives living around. How can I produce a witness?"

The King turned to Heemal and asked her whether she had a witness to support her claim. She said, "My Royal Lord! I too am a shepherdess wing on the same high pasture that Zoonmal lives in. The only neighbour or acquaintance that I have there is this very Zoonmal. I can produce no other witness to my right over this child."

The king gave orders that the child's father be brought before him. Zoonmal again beat her breast, threw herself on the floor and wailed, "Oh if only the departed one were alive! Wouldn't he then have settled the issue himself? My husband and this child's father was one Sona a shepherd. We lived in the high pastures, tending our stock. One day a terrible storm rose, thunder and lightning set off terror among our flock and it got scattered. Sona went looking for the sheep in that dreadful weather, trying to gather them back together. But he never returned, he had fallen prey to a tiger."

Now the King turned to Heemal and asked her whether she could call the child's father to come forward.

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Heemal began to weep and tear her hair in grief, "Had he been alive would he have stood by and watched silently while Zoonmal tried to commit this deed? Sona, the shepherd was not just Zoonmal's husband, he was mine too. I was his second—no, no, Zoonmal was his second wife. Both of us are the wiclows of that same Sona, who went looking for the flock and never returned."

The King gave orders for the child to be tied tightly to a log of wood and the log should then be sawn in two, so that the child would get evenly divided into two pieces from top to toe. One piece each should then be handed over to the two women claiming him.

The soldiers tied the child to the log. The executioners came and began to saw the log. Seeing this, Zoonmal screamed and clawing her face in grief, burst out, "Oh Great King, don't do this! Don't let this happen to my beloved son before my very eyes. Alas! Has an innocent child ever been subjected to such torture? My Exalted Lord, I surrender before Heemal's claim! Let her keep him so that he can live and blossom like a rose. My eyes will feel soothed even with an occasional glimpse of him."

The King said, "Tell me, who is the child's mother?" Zoonmal replied, "May I die for him! What would I not do for sake? The child is mine, but I would wish my eyes to go blind rather than see him being cut into two pictures." into two pieces! That is why I say that let him be handed over to Heemal." On the other hand, Heemal too had raised an outcry, beating her breast and weeping, "O Just King, don't let the beloved of my heart

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die so cruelly before my eyes! What shall I do? Boiling oil is burning my innards! How can I bear to see his milky white, tender body under the teeth of the saw? I am ready to withdraw my plea, quite willing for Zoonmal to have custody of the child. Let her raise him, I will be content merely by watching him, even if only from a distance." The King asked her too, "But who has actually borne him?" Heemal said, "My Good King, I have given birth to him, but I am leaving him to Zoonmal. Let him live and prosper, with her!"

The King declared, "First Zoonmal was saying that the child was hers and so was Heemal. Each persistently claimed to be the real mother, but now, in order to save the child's life, each is ready to forego her claim—Zoonmal wants him to go to Heemal and Heemal, for her part, wants him to go to Zoonmal. But it is still not clear whose child he really is, so how can we give him to one or the other woman? The only thing to do, in order to be fair and just, is to divide the child's body into two and hand one piece to each of them."

Saying this, the king beckoned the executioners and once again they began to work the saw on the log. It was about to touch the child's head when Zoonamal screamed, "Oh Compassionate King I am a wicked woman, a wicked liar! Craving for motherhood had blinded me, driven me to lodge a claim over this child, who is not mine. He belongs to Heemal. Please, I beg you to until him from the log and hand him over to her. It is she who has given birth to him!"

The King gave his orders: Heemal was to get custody of the child and Zoonmal was to be tied to the tail of a fleet-footed horse. It was to be a slow and cruel process, death would only come after her body was torn and battered, limb after limb mauled—only such a punishment was fit for one who had dared to snatch another's child.

But when the judgement fell on Heemal's ears, she began to wring her hands piteously and wailed, "Oh my King, how can Zoonmal be punished so? It is I who is the liar! This child is Zoonmal's! I could not bear the thought that she should have a child in her lap and mine should be barren. That is why I put forth this false claim. Please give the child to her and let me be tied to that horse's tail."

The King said, "It is an extremely complicated case now And it will not be possible for us to settle the matter in one day. Let the child and these two women be produced in Court tomorrow, so that justice can be done. Meanwhile the child must be kept in the custody of my Prime Minister, and the women lodged in jail."

As the orders were being executed and the two women led to the prison, the King called the Prime Minister to come, and whispered

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something in his ear. The Prime Minister bowed his head in submission to the King's desire—his will would be carried out.

Zoonmal and Heemal were in jail, mourning their fate, weeping loudly, when at about midnight there was a knock at the door. It opened to reveal the Prime Minister. He was alone, carrying an earthen pot in hand. He entered the cell, closing the door behind him, and sat down,

"O Compassionate Sir, what have you done with him, that bright

sun of ours?", Zoonmal asked.

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"O Wise Sir, where have you kept that rose of our garden?", asked Heemal.

"Your child is sleeping on a royal bed at this time, but this is going to be the last night of his life. Tomorrow in the Royal Court his body will be slashed into two pieces, and each one of you will receive one piece."

This brought forth a stream of tears from the eyes of both women and they begged, "Is there no way, O Sagacious Sir, to spare the precious, dear life of our beloved?"

The Minister said, "What can I do in the matter? The two of you change your story from moment to moment, how can the King believe anything either of you say now? That is why it is difficult for him to arrive at the truth and know who the real mother of the child is. Our judicious King will never let the rights of one to be appropriated by another!"

The women's tears were a cascade now and they spoke in voice, "O Learned, Accomplished Sir, we are just two stupid ignorant women, what can we understand of the King's justice? It is for you to show us a way to save that tender lamb from the teeth of the saw."

He turned to Zoonmal and asked, "Will you accept separation from the child in order to ensure his safety?"

"Separation from the child is like losing my sight, but if this be the only way to save him, I shall turn my heart into stone and bear

The Prime Minister turned to Heemal now, "Will you agree to give up the child and never see him again in order to save his

"Though parting from the child will mean life ebbing from my limbs, but I am ready to bear anything if it should mean his safety!" "Then listen, both of you. Hand over your child to me and leave this very moment, under cover of darkness for your home in the high pastures."

Habib Kamran / 117

Again Zoonmal beat her chest and cried, "Who will care for my innocent baby? Who will lull him to sleep, rock his crib? Whose hands will nurture him?"

Clawing her face in grief, Heemal wept, "Who will bathe him dress him, feed him or sing lullabies to him? Whose breast will give him the warmth of love?"

"It is not for you to worry about that. This child is very fortunate his stars extremely lucky and auspicious. He will be brought up like a prince, with maids, nurses and nannies to look after his every need. Peacock. feather fans will air him and his body anointed with rare perfumes and scents, he will be dressed in precious brocades and silks. If you only knew the heights to which this child would reach, you would at once give him up willingly and leave him with me. I have nothing more to say to either of you. In fact, I am not allowed to tell you everything"

"Is it really the truth you are telling us, Sir? Will you swear to it in the name of God?"

"I swear in the name of God, who has created me and who is the master of the whole universe!"

"In that case, we are ready to leave him in your care and go back to the high pasture where our home is."

"There is something else-you must never tell anyone about this deal. If even a word leaks out, all of us-the child, the two of you and I-will be cut to pieces by that same saw and no one can save us then! So you must promise that the secret will always be safe with you."

"I shall pull out my tongue, if ever it dares to mention it," said Zoonmal.

"I shall pour molten lead down my throat if ever it dares to breathe of it," said Heemal.

The Minister then brought forward the two earthen pots and said, "Here is a potful of gold coins for you, Zoonmal, and here is another for you, Heemal. Take them with you. It is enough for both of you to live comfortably for the rest of your lives, so you will never have to depend on anyone's charity in future."

The Minister turned to leave and Zoonmal hit her brow with her hand and moaned, "O God, whom shall I feed the milk from my goals and shape?" and sheep?"

Heemal beat her chest and cried, "Whose neck will I deck with the garlands of roses and honeysuckle I bring home every evening.

The Ministry The Minister walked out, but Zoonmal grabbed his sleeve, "I have

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agreed with all your suggestions, but please, for God's sake, you must listen to one thing that I suggest." "Well, what is it?"

"First you must promise that you will do what I ask for." "I promise. Now hurry up and tell me what it is."

Zoonmal placed the pot of gold coins in his hands and said, "When my darling little bud attains youth, you must give him this and tell him that it was left for him by his mother, Zoonmal".

The Minister was leaving with the pot when Zoonmal called out, "If you ever break the promise given to me, you will have to face me on the Day of Judgement!"

As the Minister was leaving, Heemal grabbed his sleeve and said, "I have agreed to all your terms, now I beg you to listen to one request from me!"

The Minister was angry now, " I am very late! Hurry up and say what it is."

Heemal brought her pot of gold coins forward and said, "When that priceless pearl of mine grows up, please give this to him and tell him that it had been left for him by his mother, Heemal."

The Minister said, "No,no, that is not possible. How can I do it? I am bound by a promise already made, how can I do what you ask for?"

"If you don't agree, I shall appeal to the King himself, first thing in the morning!"

The Minister lost his colour. Very frightened now, he said, "Clearly, the Angel of Death is hovering above your head, and you want to take me along too! Get going, you two! Not even your shadow must be seen in this town after day-break. For God's sake, go! Oh how do I make you understand the consequences of your lingering here?"

"Then you too must do what I ask, for God's sake", said Heemal. "All right, I agree. After all, who knows what the future holds?", saying this, the Minister took back the other pot of gold.

The Minister left, with Heemal's parting words ringing in his ears, "Listen, if you break faith, I will grab you by the throat on the Day

The next day came the public announcement that the Queen had delivered a baby boy, and the people were asked to celebrate the happy event for a whole month. The King had been childless so far, so his subjects? subjects' joy knew no bounds at an heir to the kingdom being born. The music of shehnai and the drum filled the air everywhere. While the married women put on festive clothes, maidens sang and danced in joy.

Habib Kamran / 119

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Professional dancing girls in red garments whirled away, abandoning Professional darleing gardening themselves to the general spirit of rejoicing. Lamps were lit to illuminate every corner of the kingdom. There was a shower of flowers everywhere Outside the palace the scene was that of a magnificent fair with loud music and boisterous crowds, who came to offer their greetings to the King, being rewarded with fistfuls of diamonds and pearls and handfuls of gold mohurs, in return.

The prince was given the name of Jahandad Shah. The Queen would not tire of holding him in her lap, fondling him all the time. There were maids to fan him. Well-known pirs and faqirs were asked to weave charms to tie on his arm to ward off the evil eye. Wet nurses suckled him and he was weaned on honey and milk.

With the passage of time, the prince grew up, learning well the ways and duties of Royalty. Meanwhile the King's age advanced and soon the day came when he could no longer discharge the tough responsibility of running the kingdom. Suddenly he became aware of his mortality and began to think of preparing to face his Maker. He called for his trusted Minister, and said to him, "My wise Minister, how can I ever repay you for all that you have done for me all these years? There is nothing with me which is of value to equal your dedicated service to me. There were so many problems I faced during my rule, so many ups and downs! But your advice saw me sail through all of them, without mishap. It was such a long reign and old age has now brought me low-I can no longer cope. I may not have long to live, so I must prepare for the other world. I have decided to hand over the reigns to my son, Prince Jahandad. What is your opinion?"

The Minister bowed his head and said, "My High Principled Lord, who am I to have displayed exceptional dedication, or wisdom? Let your blessed presence stay with us always and let your power never be diminished! Our Jahandad Shah is so wise, so brave and courageous a prince that I find myself a pigmy in his presence. God keep him, he is very well equipped to handle all the responsibilities that a ruler of this kingdom must shoulder."

The King then handed over his sceptre and crown to Prince Jahandad and left for the forest where he took up residence in a cave, giving himself up to meditating on God.

Jahandad's reign saw the kingdom prosper even more than before His glory struck terror in all his enemies. No one dared to raise a malicious eye towards any of his territories. His people were at peace, secure from all quarters; their king was a just and generous ruler and they sent up earnest prayers to God to keep him well.

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Even as the new ruler grew from strength to strength, the old Minister grew older and feebler with the passage of time. His back was no longer straight, eyesight grown dim, now he was even hard of hearing. One day he presented himself before the King and said, "My most dear Lord, you must be thinking of me as one consumed by greed, as someone, though one foot in the grave, continues to immerse himself in worldly affairs, having forgotten his duties to God. But to tell you the truth, it was my most fervent wish to renounce the world and go with your venerated father the old King, to meditate and purify my spirit. It is a long time since he kicked away his royal privilege and power, but I am still chained to my office. The reason is not greed or ambition, but there is a burden, which I cannot relieve myself of, while it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to carry it any more. The King alone, with his love and grace, can save me from this predicament."

"My Wise and Faithful Minister, all that you have done in serving the Kingdom, both during my father's time and mine, is greatly valued by us. We can also understand that due to advancing age you might not be finding it easy to carry the burden of office any more. Though your wisdom has been our guiding light, it does not mean that for our own convenience and comfort, we should continue to exploit you and force you to carry on even when advancing age makes the task difficult for you. If you should feel like giving up your job, we cannot stop you, but rest assured, you will continue to enjoy the same status and prestige in the Kingdom that you do now. You will continue to draw the same salary and perks as long as you are alive, so there is no need for you to worry on any score."

"Oh Highly Principled Monarch, thanks to your munificence and that of your father the King, I lack nothing. The cause of my worry is something else, something which I can only reveal to Your Majesty in private."

The Minister was given permission to appear before the King in the privacy of his chamber, with no one else present. He came and placed the two pots of gold coins before him.

"Gracious, Beloved King, when you were only a suckling babe, two women came to me and handed over these two pots of gold coins to me with the request that when you grew up, I should offer them to you on their behalf. I have been keeping them in trust all these years, I carried on my mind, which had stolen my peace of mind. I had given broke faith, I would have to answer for it on the Day of Judgement."

Habib Kamran / 121

Jahandad Shah was astounded. "Who were these women? What was their purpose in doing so? Didn't they know that kings do not require such gifts? And if they wanted to make an offering, why didn't they make it to the King my father, at that time?"

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The minister was lost for words, but recovering, he said, "My own opinion is that they were not mentally sound, in fact they were two mad women."

Jahandad Shah was very bright. It did not take him long to guess that the minister was hiding something, unwilling to tell the truth, preferring to tell a diplomatic lie. He asked, "How should two mad women acquire pots of gold? And would a wise man like you leave it at that, making no effort to investigate the matter? Why should they hand over pots of gold to you and ask you to give them to me when I reached adulthood even go to the extent of holding out the threat of retribution if you didn't do their bidding? What made them so fond of me? And more than anything else, why did you hesitate so long before coming to me with this gift? Listen, if you are so concerned about the other world, you must think about this world first—if you don't tell me the truth, the whole truth, plain and simple, you are doomed!"

The minister knew that it wouldn't be easy to fool an intelligent, perceptive man like Jahandad, by weaving a web of words before him. He had no choice but to relate the whole sequence of events exactly as it had unfolded itself.

The revelation of the truth was a bolt from the blue for Jahandad. He was speechless with horror. But he was a king after all, able to exercise self-control and hide the turmoil in his heart. After a long silence, he spoke, "My wise and resourceful Minister, did you finally find out who, between the two, Zoonmal and Heemal, was my real mother?"

"My King, my adored Prince! Is not our great, noble Queen, who nurtured and doted on you all these years since you grew up from infanct to youth, your mother? She, who held you to her heart, nourished you with her love and had you crowned as a king, she alone is your mother," there was a touch of reproach in the minister's voice.

"The Queen of course. What woman other than the Queen of this land could be my mother? Her status cannot be usurped by anyone. I am her son, surely. But after the heartrending truth you told me today, I must know who actually gave birth to me. I have to discover my true identity, find out where my origin is. Till I do so, my crown, my life, my very existence is useless, utterly meaningless."

"My Lord, you were destined to be king—nature itself arranged it so. Please listen to me, forget the past."

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"One may succeed in deceiving others by hiding ones real identity, but not oneself. Haven't you seen clowns putting up a comic performance outside the palace every year? With one playing the role of a king, another a minister, a third someone else? But they know who they really are. It seems that I must also think of myself as one of those jokers now. I have to know who my real mother is, whose womb I was carried in and delivered from, otherwise there is no purpose to my life."

The minister gave the matter some thought and said, "There is just one way, and that is to call both Zoonmal and Heemal here. The King himself can then ascertain the truth from them."

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"I know they are alive. I also know where their home in the high pastures is—I have kept in touch with them all these years—so fetching them should not be difficult. I shall arrange it myself."

Messengers were dispatched and within a few days both the women, Zoonmal and Heemal were brought to the palace. Jahandad Shah had been told by the minister that the two women would constantly change their statements in each other's presence, so he gave orders that they should be lodged in separate rooms, neither of them must know where the other was, nor should any means of communication between the two be provided to them. The king also gave orders that they must receive royal treatment, fit for queens.

After a few days, Jahandad Shah went to see Zoonmal and said, "Zoonmal, try to recall that day when you were found quarelling with Heemal over a child at this place. You claimed the child as your own and so did Heemal and the matter was brought before the King, who too could not decide who the mother was and thus did not know who the child should be given to. Finally you left the child with the King's minister. Do you remember?"

"Great King, I am so old, my memory feeble, how should I temember anything now? I have no idea of the child you mention—I have never had a quarrel with anyone over any matter, nor have ever I come here before."

"The child you left with the minister that day was put in her own lap by the Queen! Take a good look at me—I am that child."

Zoonmal looked at him and said, "My darling Prince, my dearest son, may your days increase a millionfold! Let my days be added to for ever! Who but you deserved to wear this crown?"

"I only want to know one thing from you—who was it that gave to me? Was it Heemal or you?"

Habib Kamran / 123

"My beloved son, ask me nothing! Why do you want me to pull out my own tongue by the root?"

"But why should you do that?"

"Because I have given a promise— I must pull out my tongue before it can dare to speak of it."

"But who could have made you give this promise?"

"No, my Prince. I seal my lips. Not a word more shall I utter."

Disheartened and frustrated, Jahandad left. Then he went to Heemal'a chamber, and asked, "Do you remember that child, Heemal, whom you and Zoonmal left with the King's minister? The child over whom you two were quarrelling, both claiming to be his mother? And the King himself had been unable to decide who the child should be given to, between the two of you?"

Heemal answered, "Majestic King, can death and sorrows leave memory intact? What child are you talking about? I have no idea at all."

"The child I am talking about, is a grown up man now, and he is standing before you. I am that child."

"My beloved Prince!! God grant you life and success for ever! My darling son, let me die for you! May you always be safe from the evil eye, eternally in bloom! Who but you deserved to wear these royal robes?"

"Please do me a favour, Heemal, and tell me who actually gave birth to me. Was it Zoonmal or you?"

"Better to pour molten lead down my throat rather than ask me to answer you, my adored Prince!"

"But what is the reason? Why do you want your throat sealed?"
"Because I have promised! Before a word of what you are asking to know about is breathed out by it, I shall myself pour molten lead down my throat!"

"Alas! Does it mean that I my desire to know will always remain

Heemal said, "You, a royal prince! And the two of us, just ordinary shepherdesses from a far-off pasture! What will you gain from us? Why put these questions to us?"

"Because I want to know! I must know who gave birth to me.

I must know who I actually am."

"Light of my eyes! I would have told you, but my lips have been sealed, so much the worse for me!", said Heemal.

Jahandad hit his brow in frustration and appealed to Heemal again, "At least tell me one thing—who made the two of you give this promise?"

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"It was your Minister, Noble King, the same minister who sent for us and on whose behest we have come here."

The next day the Minister was summoned to the King's private

chamber. "The two simple souls from the high pasture have sealed their lips. It seems that someone has extracted a promise from them both that the truth will never be breathed by them."

"My Great King, I am the guilty one—it is I who made them

Jahandad gave his Minister a hard look and a tremor went through the Minister's body.

"I had to do it— had the truth become public, it would have been a calamity. God only knows how many would have perished!" "And you would have been among the ones who perished!"

"Most certainly! The King your father, would certainly have had me cut into pieces with that saw."

"And that made you cover up the truth for ever! But tell me, what happens to one who is put under the teeth of a saw?"

The Minister trembled in agitation and said, "Our King is wise and knowledgeable, why does he need me to tell him?"

"The one who is brought under a saw will die even before the first tooth pierces through him. He will thus be released from all pain and suffering. But what about the one whose body has been divided into two by a saw and yet continues to live?"

The Minister's face was drained of all colour, it seemed to have turned blue. Trembling in fear, he stuttered, "But...but, is such a thing possible?"

"It is. And you are standing before such a one now-I am the one to whom it has happened."

"Beloved Prince! That is why I had begged you to forget the past." "If it had been possible to forget the past, those two pots of gold would not have appeared before me— I mean the pots that those two shepherdesses had given you for me—and my soul would not have been in such torment!"

The next day, on Jahandad Shah's orders, the Minister was brought under the teeth of the saw, his body sliced in two. And then once again, lahandal Jahandad stood before Zoonmal and asked, "I ask you once again to give me the answer to the question I had put you the other day. You must answer me now."

Again Zoonmal gave him the same reply—let him pull out her tongue by the root before she could utter a single word and break faith.

Habib Kamran / 125

"Don't be afraid. The person to whom you had made the promise is nowhere now. He is gone."

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"He is dead."

"Lord have mercy! Dead, is he? But that Great King, before whose throne of Justice Heemal and I were brought that day, is he all right?"

"My Noble father, our King is all right, God keep us under his benevolent presence for ever! It is his grace that enables us to survive on this land!"

Zoonmal stood silent, with her head bowed.

"Answer me I say! Was it Heemal or you that gave birth to me?" "Noble King! Would a poor, lowly shepherdess-living on Godforsaken heights—ever have had the good fortune to produce a son like you? So handsome, so majestic in bearing, brought up in a palace with royalty as company, wearing the crown of a King? How could I ever be your mother, my Beloved King?"

"So you admit that you are not my mother!"

"Oh my Heart and Soul, is it possible for anyone in the world to deny it, if she should be called mother by you?"

"This is no answer to my query! Give me a plain and straight

reply."

"I know nothing. Please go and ask Heemal, she might be able to tell you something to make you happy and set your heart at rest."

Jahandad went into deep thought for a while and then said, "I

have already questioned her."

Zoonmal was in a panic. Pale with fear, she asked, "What did she say?"

"She said that she was my real mother, the one who had actually given birth to me, and that Zoonmal had made a false claim on me."

"Yes, Oh yes! Zoonmal told you the truth, my dear. The jewel that we had handed over to the Minister that day was certainly born of that same Heemal. Just as he emerged from the womb, I put him in my lap and held him to my breast. I was the one who bathed him and swaddled him in a piece of tush spun with my own hand, held him under the folds of my pheran to keep out the cold, let him sleep on my breast to give him a soft bed, fed him on the sweet milk of the goats and ewes lest he feel hungry. That is why I had said that he was my son."

"Yes, that is the truth, my Heart and Soul! May my life be sacrificed for you!"

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Soon after, Jahandad stood before Heemal and asked, "Answer the question that I had asked you earlier, Heemal!"

"But I told you that I was helpless and could not give you any

answer." "Don't be afraid! The man, that minister who had forced you to keep your mouth shut is no longer in the world. He is dead."

"What, the poor fellow is dead? Alas for him! What about that great King, who had gone into that case involving me and Zoomal, is he well and living?"

"Long live my father the King. It is he who is the light of this country."

Heemal stood silent, with bowed head.

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Jahandad demanded, "Now tell me who my real mother is. Was it Zoonmal or you who gave birth to me?"

"Would a wretched shepherdess deserve to be the mother of a prince, radiant like the sun as you are? How could I be your mother?" "Then who was I born of?"

"What can I say? Why don't you ask Zoonmal? She is the one who knows and can tell you the truth."

Jahandad thought for some time and then spoke, "I have already asked her."

Suddenly Heemal seemed to have been washed over by a saffron dye, pale from head to toe. Panic-stricken, she burst out, "What did she say, my beloved prince?"

"She said that she was my real mother, not you."

"Of course she told you the truth. The bright gem that we handed over to the minister that day was born from Zoonmal's womb. The moment it happened, I took him in my arms and he reigned over my heart. It was I who lulled him to sleep, rocked his cradle day and night, made garlands of poppies and jasmine to deck his neck, and fed him on lumps of sugar candy. It was this that made me say he was my

Jahandad's eyes began to glow like burning coals and he said, "You are two lying, deceitful women!"

"What? Am I not telling you the truth, my son?"

"You lie! Zoonmal never told me any of this. I just made it up to test how truthful you are."

"Star of my life! If it is not true that Zoonmal is your mother and I tell you now that it was I who gave birth to you, would you believe many

"Truth is always the truth—whether anyone believes it or not will affect it," there was anger in Jahandad's voice.

Habib Kamran / 127

"But how will you be convinced of what is the truth?"

"Only when the story you tell is the same as the one that Zoonmal tells and the story that Zoonmal tells is the same as the one that you tells and the story that is the truth. But if you persist in saying one thing and Zoonmal another, how will I know what is true and what is not?"

Heemal wept and said, "But you have separated us, we don't know anything about each other! When you were a baby and we were brought before the King, even then the two of us had made the mistake of telling different stories. Won't you let me meet Zoonmal just once?"

"What kind of truth would it be that depended on mutual consultations?"

"What would a stupid, ignorant shepherdess know of truth and untruth? To me that alone is the truth which ensures that no thorn ever pricks your tender foot and no harm comes to you!"

"If you are really interested in my well being, you must tell me plainly whether I was born of you or Zoonmal."

"My beloved son, sorrows and anxieties have broken me. I don't know whether I am capable of telling the truth that you are searching for. Please ask Zoonmal, she is very wise. What she tells you will be the truth. Afterwards, tell me what she said and I will corroborate it and then at last the two of us will speak with one voice, not two, and your mind will finally be set at rest."

Jahandad was furious, "Now I know that as long as you two witches are alive I will never know the fact. To know the truth it is necessary that I put an end to one of you!"

The next day Heemal was tied to the tail of the fleetest horse in the royal stable. The horse was made to gallop away and run til Heemal's body was torn to bits and she was dead.

Once again Jahandad stood before Zoonmal and said, "Tell me the truth today. Who is my real mother, you or Heemal?"

"But I have already told you, my precious!"

"But that was not the truth!"

"Heemal had never told me that she was my real mother. I just made it up to test how truthful you were, because you hadn't given me a straight answer. In fact she had said that my real mother was you. Zoonmal."

"May I die for you, my son! If what she said gives you pleasure, believe it to be the truth. All right then, I am your mother." "Why did you lie in the first instance, then?", Jahandad raged

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"I had no idea of what Heemal would say. I was afraid, and so Was Heemal, because that day when you were a babe in our arms we was Heeman, had made the blunder of speaking in two voices and as a result the had made sat on the throne of justice that day had ordered that you may my tongue fall in pieces before I can even say it—should be brought under the teeth of a saw and cut into two."

"Tell me what the truth is—who gave birth to me, was it you

"If you want to know the truth, my Prince, let me see Heemal

just once."

"So that you can repeat what she says? Is that the truth you are talking about? Let me tell you one truth—you will never be able to see Zoonmal's face again!"

"Why, where is she? Is she all right?"

"I had that lying witch put to death!"

A cry escaped Heemal, "Heemal is dead? Why should I live then?" She beat her chest, tore her clothes to shreds, wept inconsolably, grieving and mourning for Heemal. Finally exhausted, she spoke through her tears, "After Sona the shepherd's death there was no one left but the two of us, she had me and I had her. We were everything to each other-confidante, consoler, healer of heartaches, sister, brother, mother, father and friend, who shared each other's sorrows and pains! Alas, the poor, innocent Heemal has been killed?" She turned to Jahandad and continued, "You wanted to know who your real mother was? It was this very Heemal from whose womb you were born, the same Heemal whom you have put to death. You are a murderer! You had your own mother killed, the one who gave you life! Go away, I cannot bear to look at you, you are a monster!"

"What did you say", Jahandad said in agony, "was Heemal, whom I put to death, my real mother? If what you say is the truth, then I will give myself the deserved punishment," saying this, he drew out his dagger and was about to plunge it into his chest when zoonmal wrenched his hand and said, "You drove one knife into me when you had Heemal klled, do you want to drive another into my heart when you kill yourself before my very eyes?"

Jahandad's hand froze and he said, "My death will drive a knife into your heart? Is that what you are saying? What does that

"It does not mean anything! Henceforth you will get no more answers from me," she turned her face away. Jahandad threw himself at her feet, wept and said, "Won't you have pity on me, Zoonmal? For once lift the veil of the veil of secrecy and tell me in clear words who gave birth to me,

Habib Kamran / 129

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you or Heemal? If you don't tell me now, this minute I die here, a your very feet!"

very teet! "Give me leave till tomorrow, and then I shall tell you the whole

truth."

"Even though this night's wait will seem to stretch till eternity for me, be more painful than Doomsday itself, but I shall bear it all."

"But there is one condition—you must not come to me henceforth I myself shall send word to you. The message you receive from me will be the truth, you must believe."

"But who will bring me your message?"

"Withdraw all the maids and nurses you have kept in my service, except one whom you trust completely. Leave her with me and she will bring you my message tomorrow morning."

Jahandad ordered the withdrawal of all servants from Zoonmal's chamber, except one elderly nursemaid. Late at night he went into his own bedroom.

Early the next morning, even before daybreak, there was a knock at his door. It was the first time that someone had dared to wake him up from sleep. He opened the door. It was the elderly nursemaid he had left in Zoonmal's chamber. Her hair dishevelled, she was in a state of shock. Beating her breast, she blurted out, "Master! Zoonmal is dead."

Jahandad's face fell. He felt suffocated and ran to the chamber. He saw the dagger which had fallen from his hand when Zoonmal wrenched it from his hand the previous day, plunged deep in her breast She had done the deed apparently while the nursemaid was in sleep, and now Zoonmal lay cold in death.

After her last rites were performed and she was buried, Jaahandad called the nursemaid in the privacy of his room and asked her, "What was the message Zoonmal gave you for me before her death?"

"How can I bring it to my lips, Master? It will burn holes in my

tongue and mouth! I dare not say it!"

"Tell me at once—everything she told you, word by word. Don't be afraid, even if its import should make the whole world go up in flames!"

"Zoonmal asked me to tell you that you were born of neither Heemal nor Zoonmal, but that you had burst out of a rock!"

The news spread through the length and breadth of the kingdom that the ruler was not a prince born of the Queen, but a shepherd's child from some far flung high pasture, and that he would give up the throne and leave in search of his origin and real identity. Through announcements, the people were asked to select a new ruler.

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Jahandad took off the crown and royal robes, dressed himself in ochre robes and walked out of the palace. He wandered through in ocnic and plains, hills and mountains, forests and wildernesses, vallies and dales, rivers and waterfalls, lakes and springs, cities and villages, marketplaces and narrow lanes, searching, but could find no information anywhere. He questioned sadhus and sages, ascetics and dervishes, pirs anywheres, the wisest philosophers, scholars and healers, the knowers and the ignorant, the commoners and the gifted ones—but no one could tell him who he was born of. No one could tell him of his origin. Finally he reached the place where the old King was meditating on God in a cave. He threw himself at his feet and said, "My Master and Father, you picked me up from the dust and placed me so high! You made me your son and raised me like a prince, with nothing to lack. Finally you placed the crown on my head and made me King. You are my master, my father, my king. But fate played a cruel trick on me and I realized that calling myself King was a mere illusion, that I was actually a shepherd boy, son of a poor shepherd, not a Prince."

The King looked at him with affection and said, "My dear son, my Prince, seeing you in this state makes knives turn in my heart—I do not regret that you have discovered the truth, glad that you have found things out yourself. Had it not been so, I might have told you myself. Though having renounced the crown and the world, I have bid goodbye to worldly relationships also I still think of you as my own flesh and blood, so nothing can ever affect my love for you, in fact you are dearer to me now. You continue to be my son and heir and the lawful King of this land."

"I have left the palace and all its luxuries, given up the crown and pushed away the throne because my mind was in turmoil and I had no peace. I could not discover who I was born of, or where my origin was and what my true identity is. You had so many wise, learned and resourceful ministers in your court, so many scholars and astrologers who could measure the path of the stars, and then you yourself were so sagacious, brightest among the bright. Didn't you ever think about it, or didn't anyone say anything which might give me a clue, an idea, a hint or warning of who I was because of Toompal or Heamal?"

The King looked at Jahandad's face and two streams of tears began down his cheeks.

Translated from Kashmiri by Neerja Mattoo

Habib Kamran / 131

Eating Out With the Kumars

Sunil Sharma

Tt was their idea of fun. I had just tagged along. There was no Lalternative for me. I had just dropped in. First they were awkwardly silent, then awkwardly 'overjoyed' and then awkwardly hesitant. "In fact we were going out for dinner. If you had come five minutes later, you would have found the house locked," said Ramesh—in a voice that you regularly hear on a customer-care service number-a voice metallic and antiseptic, chilling and off-putting in its friendly remoteness.

"I am lucky."

"Yes."

"OK, you go ahead with your plan. I will stay on here in the house till you return." Of course, I was joking.

Ramesh smiled, "Come on, buddy. We cannot leave you as the

resident watchman here."

"Hmm...you see I came unannounced. I do not want to disturb my best friend's evening out..."

He laughed. "That you have already done. Come on, yaar, do not waste our time. Join us, we are in a hurry." I knew I was a kind of intruder on their suburban moment of bliss.

I smiled, "OK, fine! Hope bhabhiji does not mind."

Bhabhiji said in a far off voice, "No problem," and gave an anaemic half-inch smile, a smile that hardly softened the contours of her long thin, and from what I could see, a stern whipped-up face. She has always been like the been like that—aloof like the great Olympians. Her voice had always been joyless, a hint of strong Arctic ice in it. We called her an ice maiden I could feel a subtle hostility in her flat, monotonous features and dull voice, resentment voice, resentment against this interruption.

They came down in the elevator and went to the car park. All

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around were the high-rises glinting in the early summer night. A pile of around well-lit boxes of cement-n-glass. As distant as the standardised crowds well-lit boate standardised crowds surging in the busy choking streets. Typical of suburban Mumbai or any metro now, anywhere in the world!

Ramesh was taking an eternity to take out his car. Maybe, they were discussing, arguing about me. I felt like a municipality garbage bin. I felt like fleeing from the scene, much like a criminal. I started moving towards the exit of the building as quietly as a cat, blending with the background as much as possible. I successfully made my exit and hit the street, moving casually, neither too fast nor too slow. A few minutes later, a car screeched behind me and the voice, husky and irritated, hollered, "Hey, what is the idea?"

So finally I was caught again!

"Hmm," Ramesh grunted. "You were acting as if your bum was on fire!" and, laughed aloud. His anorexic wife showed no signs of being alive. She just stared ahead at the rushing road.

"You see, I felt guilty..."

"Guilty! Yes. Hundred percent guilty! First you come popping up like Casper at wrong places and wrong times and then you do this disappearing act like Mandrake."

"Well, well...I tried your landline. Tried your cell a couple of times." I said, a bit hurt, off colour.

"We came half-an-hour before. Thought we should eat out. Both of us got tired. Cooking is hell."

"Life is hell," said the wife in her flat tone, features expressionless, like a Madam Tussad statue.

"Two is party. Three is a crowd," I said and laughed dryly. Both ignored my wisdom and skeletal laugh.

Ramesh dodged the commuters, strays, and speeding buses and hit the highway.

"Where to, honey?"

"Oh, our favourite joint," she said in the stiff voice of a morgue attendant.

"The one at Juhu?"

"Yeah!"

"OK!"

He speeded up and raced down the highway much like Formula-1 driver Schumacher. He switched on the car stereo and put on some heavy metal that violently assaulted my auditory senses. Sitting in the backseat of the Lancer, I felt like an idiot, clutching my meager ihola with it. hola with its bare content, a tabloid and the case of my bi-focals.

"And who is this Caspar?" I asked, timidly, anxious for any icebreaker,

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"Hey, you do not watch TV?"

"No, not much."

"No, not much."
"Then how do you survive Mumbai evenings at home? TV is the life line of the nuclear families here," Ramesh said.

"I dunno. I hate the weepy stuff. All saas-bahu stuff. Those huge sets we do not find in a Malad 2 BHK set up," I said lamely.

"Oh! TV is not intellectual. Who bothers things intellectual, or real?"

"Life is not intellectual," thin wife volunteered.

"Yeah. Life is eating lot of hot stuff." He said, increasing the volume. Heavy metal hit me like a stunning blow of a hammer. Conversation was like a dead telephone line that never gets repaired fast here.

The Hut was almost on the edge of the glittering Arabian Sea. They had recreated the magic of a Goan village. Lots of swaying palms, with stringed lights. Thatched roofs. Chairs beneath. The sea breeze, damp and smelly, rode in on the wings of the night. Part of the package! Ramesh ordered Bacardi with lime, seafood.

"What else, honey?"

"Thai paneer. Veg Manchurian and butter naans. Lots of green salad," she said, becoming alive at the cooking smells.

He obeyed. I never existed for them.

Two quick Bacardies and they revived.

"Enjoy. It is lovely night."

"Yes, I am enjoying. Food is better here," she said, looking past me, in the general direction.

"Yeah. Food is excellent here and so is money," he said.

"We get the value for money," she said, still looking in the direction of general humanity out there.

Of course, no humanity existed there except the diners, in various stages of drunkenness.

"So, what brings you here, buddy?"

"Well...I had this sudden urge to meet you, to have a dialogue, to talk to you...More than two years have passed since we last men. I just wanted to talk to you," I said.

"Oh, so-so. Life for a salesperson is not as exciting as it is for

He laughed. "You are always complaining. You meet people, dead and targets. Delicities a broker and a tax consultant." lines, and targets. Delivering goods. It is really wonderful."

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I said nothing.

"Nice you came. For old times' sake, let us enjoy. This is the best rum ordered for you," he said. Just then, his mobile rang. He talked business for ten minutes.

I felt like part of the bamboo furniture. The sea hissed in the background—much like my hosts' pent up anger at the Casper sitting with them. Wife sipped the bacardi and ate Caesar's salad or whatever it is called.

"Hey, nibble something. Munchies add to the pleasure of eating,"

he commanded.

"Sure. You have a good cell phone," I said.

He laughed. A dry, staccato laugh of a smoker or an asthmatic. "A camera phone. She is just gorgeous." He is putting on his richierich show. He stroked the phone tenderly as if stretching the body of a naked woman.

"Honey, anything else?"

"Not at the moment," she said in a slightly tipsy voice. "It is worth dying for ... "

"What?"

"Food here," she said.

"Oh, food, good food, music turns her on," he said and winked at me.

"Yeah. As the good cars, cell phones, watches turn you on," she said, laughing metallically, features dead.

"Yes. They are the guy things. Objects of great desire. Males are hung upon them."

"He cares more for his Lancer," she said, voice neutral, to the world in general.

"Yeah. The way you care for new clothes, jewellery and bags," he said, playfully and teasing.

"Do not start that again," she warned.

"I was joking."

"Your jokes are getting stale and awful. Silly."

He blanched. I felt uneasy. Luckily for him, he got another call on his cell. Woman munched and sipped—rigid and fixed in her body language. The diners around smoked, drank and ate. A man sang a Pankaj Udhas number from an elevated platform. Two men accompanied this tesident crooner who sang to an indifferent audience.

Then the food arrived. Ramesh finished off his business conversation and looked at the sumptuous spread and said, "Wow!", while wife attacked the food has been all was happy the food hungrily. I had asked the waiter not to serve me. I was happy with my share of salad.

"It is just delicious!" she said.

"Yeah." He said, mouthful. "You, not eating?"

"No. I do not feel like eating."

"No, I do not reet and "This is the best stuff, best hotel in the town. Folks splurge here" "Not many can afford this kind of set up," wife said.

"Not many can all which will be a course, off limits to crowds."

"Mumbai has the best upscale joints. 'Course, off limits to crowds." Exclusive. We often dine here. A dinner for a couple costs upwards of Rs. 7,000/-. Costly, very costly!"

The tone was chilling. At least, to me.

The crowds could never afford all this. The crowds travelled in subhuman locals, sweated out in homes and offices, got fired and hired in this Mumbai. They are a wada pav from the corner shop or pav bhaji or Chinese fried rice, occasionally bought a Sidney Sheldon from the Fort pavements, read the evening papers and plopped down on bed and slept like a dog...to start all over again next morning.

Not their idea of Mumbai.

I felt stifled. I had strayed into an enemy zone.

"Excuse me," I said and stood up, clutching my meager cloth bae They did not look up.

"I am going to bathroom," I said.

"With your jhola," said Ramesh, smile a tad crooked.

"An old habit," I said, grimly.

"We won't rob you," he said, gulping food in quick succession. I did not say. I knew he knew I was leaving. He did not show any emotion on his fat leathery face. Just continued attacking the Rs 7000/ food served before them, the kind you get at Rs 100 at the roadside dhabba. I started moving—eager to make my escape. I reached the exit and looked back. Ramesh looked at me precisely at that moment and then hurriedly dropped his gaze.

In fact, he did not care. I, too, did not care. How long this pretense? I came out of that fucking hotel. Walked down to the bus stop, breathing outside fresh air lustily like a sprinter hungry for the Oxygen. I stood there at the bus stop, waiting for a crowded bus that will take me to my home, sweet but little home, where I will be a monarch for the night, before starting my Sisyphean journey again next morning. The air, the regular smells and sounds of the city revived me and then I felt happy—to see the lurching bus coming over to me like an old budds.

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The Birth Pangs of a Poet: The Early Works of Soso Tham, Chief Bard of the Khasis

Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

Coso Tham (1873-1940) is the uncrowned, though acknowledged poet Slaureate of the Khasis and his death anniversary falling on December 18 has always been commemorated as a state holiday since the late 1970s. According to his most authoritative biographer, Hughlet Warjri, Tham was born in Sohra, or Cherrapunjee, in 1873 (actual date unknown) into "a poor but happy family," newly converted to Christianity. He was the third and only son in a family of four children. His mother, Lyngkien Tham, was said to be a very pious woman and married one Hat Tongper from Sohkha, a village near Dawki, who had come to Sohra to work with the Welsh missionaries. Though poor, the young Tham was fortunate in other respects, for he grew up in a cheerful, God-fearing family, in a place which had not only become world-famous because of its recordshattering rainfall and the breath-taking beauty of its landscape, but also because it had been the first headquarters of the British empire in the Khasi Hills, where the new religion and school education had first taken toot. Warjri says in his book, U Soso Tham bad ki Jingtrei Jong U (1980) that Tham was among the few who were able to take advantage of this education and that he studied in one of the missionary schools there after the Class VI, although his father had died sometime before that. A little after this first tragedy, the family shifted to Shillong, which had replaced Sohra as the new capital in 1874, and Tham was reported to have continued with his with his studies in the new township. But the early death of his father, it seems it seems, proved too much for his family, and this consorted with grinding poverty to force him out of school when he was only in Class

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Warjri also records that at that time there was an attempt to induct Tham as a student in the newly-established Theological College at Sohra, but that somehow did not work out and so he began his career as an itinerant teacher in village primary schools and finally landing up on October 12, 1905 as a teacher of Khasi in Shillong Government High School, Mawkhar (the only high school in the Hills in those days). Tham remained in the school till he retired on July 30, 1931.

Soso Tham's total output as a writer is rather small. He has two volumes of poetry to his credit: Ka Duitara Ksiar (The Golden Harp, 1925), comprising 46 short poems, including lyrics, ballads and nursery rhymes, and 14 translations of various English poets; and his "crowning work," Ki Sngi Ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep (The Olden Days of U Hynñiew Trep (1936), 2 which is a single long poem having 181 stanzas of six lines divided into 10 sections, each under a separate heading. The poem is about the Hynniew Trep people, ancestors of the seven Khasi sub-tribes comprising, the Khynriams in East Khasi Hills, the Pnars in Jaintia Hills, the Bhois in Ri Bhoi District, the Wars in the foothills bordering Bangladesh, the Marams, Lyngngams, and the now-little-heard-of Diko in West Khasi Hills. Tham had also translated Aesop's Fables, Charles Dickens's The Life of Our Lord and the great Shakespearean comedy, The Tempest, to which he had given the title of U Kyllang. Unfortunately the manuscript of this translation was irrecoverably lost because of "the reckless negligence" of his heirs.

All this then, along with some translations and original compositions of religious songs, constitutes the entire volume of his work as a writer. There are very important biographical details to account for this lack of prolificacy, but then again, it is this very fact which has become the surprise of surprises, where his fame and popularity as a poet is concerned. How could a poet whose output is so meagre, who had started writing so late in life and who had confessed in the preface to Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynniew Trep that "he had never known about Art or Poetry: foot, metre, rhyme, rhythm, idea" and that all these had seemed to him "like a confused litter of cattle bones in the hills" rise to become a national poet and stand towering over Khasi literature like someone who "doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus," to borrow Cassius's description of Caesar.

Some of his poems were set to music and became immediate hits. His inspiring words were heard everywhere: in casual chats, in public meetings, in funeral gatherings and wherever people had anything to say about the burning issues of the day and the future of their land. Such was his powerful appeal that he was quoted by the learned and unlearned

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to say Such earned alike; by the old and the young, as if his poetry was like the vast expanse of the horizon, accommodating the motley crowd within it.

Although all this glory had come only 33 years after his death, there were those among his eminent contemporaries who had immediately spotted his genius and heaped praises upon him. S. K. Bhuyan, 5 called him the "Robert Burns of the Khasi Highlands" in his book, Studies in the Literature of Assam (1956), which also contains a chapter on "Modern Khasi Literature." Rev. Oliver Thomas, the then General Secretary of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, described him as "a man of great gifts" and continued, "had it been possible for him, as a young man, to have had the advantages of an academic training, he surely would have risen to great heights as a scholar." Contemporary writer like Homiwell Lyngdoh and R. R. Thomas were simply captivated by the sheer magic of his poetry. Homiwell Lyngdoh was inspired to write an essay on the origins of the Hynniew Trep people after reading Tham's long poem, Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynniew Trep and Thomas called this poem "one of the best if not the very best in Khasi Literature. Itis decidedly the best in verse that a Khasi has produced and is undoubtedly a classic."7

To the later writers and critics, Soso Tham was not only a poet but also a visionary, a philosopher and a moral teacher. H. W. Sten compared his crowning work with Milton's Paradise Lost in his book Na ka Hyndai sha ka Lawei (1980) and writing earlier, R. S. Lyngdoh had even gone further as to say in the "Soso Tham Birth Centenary Souvenir 1973" that "If Rabindranath Tagore could achieve world recognition through his English version of his Gitanjali U Soso Tham can as well achieve such fame if only his masterpiece [Ki Sngi Ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep] could be translated into other languages." (P 71) Lyngdoh's dream may or may not be realised, but all this high praise decidedly prove one thing—that Soso Tham is a poet worthy of study and research. Such a study is all the more exigent because to the outside world, to the non-Khasi readers, he was but a name, a reputation, whose aura shines but whose poetry still lurks in the dark confines of Khasi Literature.

It is something very strange that the works of so popular a poet among his own people have never been translated and the few that have been are so bad that they have not only not found a place in any recognised journal of poetry in the country, but they also threaten about himself and the apathy of most of his contemporary readers in the following lines:

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Jar-jar hapoh ki dieng ha khlaw, U san hapdeng ki ñiut; U syntiew pher, u tiew-dohmaw,-Laiphew-na-ar jingmut.

Jar-Jar harud ki wah ba tngen, Ban iwbih ynda stai; U tiew tyrkhang ba ai jingkmen, U jyrngam khadar bnai.

Iathuh, premmiet ba ieit ki blei, Bad phi ki lyoh bun rong; Iathuh ia nga u don haei U khlur ba paw nyngkong.

Jar-Jar u im, jar-jar u jah,
Hapoh rai-eh rai-dam;
Jar-Jar ha jingtep ai un thiah,Hapoh u phlang jyrngam. (P 12)
("U Phlang Jyrngam," Ka Duitara Ksiar)

Below is the English version:

Quietly in the wood,

It grows among the weeds;

An uncommon blossom, u tiew dohmaw,*

A thing of lofty thoughts.

Quietly by shadowy streams,

To be a fragrance when faded,

The joy-giving fern

Remains green for twelve moons.

Tell me twilight, beloved of the gods,
And you the motley clouds;
Tell me where is that star
That first speckles the sky.

Quietly he lives, quietly he dies,
Amidst the wilderness;
Quietly in the grave let him rest,
Beneath the green, green grass.

("The Green Grass")

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^{*} A wild flower, symbol of great wisdom.

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If we place this poem side by side with that of Yi Kyu-Bo, a world-If we place the poet, we will understand how Soso Tham has been able famous 1502 I nam has been able to transcend the immediate boundaries of his life, his time and his culture to transcent to the universal feelings of mankind itself. The poem of Yi Kyu-Bo reads:8

> I have always feared withering sooner than grass and trees, But I find the volumes of my poor poems worse than nothing. Who will know a thousand years from now. That a man named Yi was born in a corner of Korea? ("To My Son Editing My Poem")

It is this transcendence, this affinity between Tham and other poets of the world that has been the inspiring force behind this assessment. It might well be a surprise if the readers of Tham's poetry come to know. that writing in 1936, Tham had already pre-empted J. F. Kennedy in his famous call to his countrymen, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."9 Writing 24 years earlier, Tham had made the same call in his famous lyric "Ki Sngi U Hynniew Trep" 10 when he said, 'Ngi im ha kiwei pat ki sngi, / Aiu ngin leh namar ka n?" ("We live in other days than our own / what shall we do for our land?"). One therefore feels that it is time to draw more attention to Tham, to exhume his works as it were, from the crypt of Khasi literature and exhibit them to the world so that they may be read and appreciated by all.

It was Tham's hiraeth,11 his love and forlorn longing for his language and literature that had made him turn to writing and poetry. According to Warjri, it was Tham's entrance into the Shillong Government High School as a teacher that had brought him face to face with the stark tealities of Khasi literature in those days. The predicament Khasi literature was in then profoundly disturbed him and he committed himself to shoulder the responsibility of developing it. A brief summary 12 of its history till Tham's teaching commission in the school will afford more insight into the situation.

The Khasis, who had a rich oral literature consisting of myths, folk stories, fairy tales, fables, narrative poetry, gnomic phawar (verse) and lively tales, fables, narrative poetry, gnomic phawar (verse) and lively traditional songs, 13 had never obtained the blessing of the written Word until the mid-nineteenth century, that is, until the appearance of the Wel-1 the Welsh Presbyterian Missionary, Thomas Jones, on July 22, 1841. Prior

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to this, around 1831, there were indeed attempts by Krishna Chandra Pal and Alexander B. Lish of the American Baptist Mission of Serampore, to reduce Khasi to the complex Bengali script. But these had proved unsuccessful and it was left to Jones to take up where they had left off. The tenacious and inventive Welshman resorted to Welsh orthography and the Roman script to cast the language in written form. The outcome was the publication, in early 1842, of the First Khasi Reader or Cacitah Ban Hicai Ca Citien Cassia. It is out of this little book that all other Khasi books have emerged.

Since that time till the year 1895, the writing and publication of Khasi books rested solely in the hands of the Presbyterian missionaries and therefore, the literature of this period of 40 years or so was "almost exclusively Christian and moralistic in character." Jones himself translated the Welsh Rhodd Mam (A Mother's Gift, 1842), the Gospel of Mathew (1846), a book of scriptural catechism and a collection of hymns for use in the mission's first three schools in Sohra. From the pens of his successors came translations of Rhodd Tad (A Father's Gift), Watt's Scripture History (1859), Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1864), Longfellow's "The Psalm of Life" and the complete translation of the Bible (1891).

The only books written during the period that had little or nothing to do with religion was William Pryse's Khasi Grammar (1859) and Hugh Robert's Anglo-Khasi Dictionary (1870) and Khasi Grammar. John Roberts, who had earlier translated Pilgrim's Progress, the "Psalm of Life" and the Bible, added the less religious-centred Khasi First Reader, Khasi Second Reader, Khasi Third Reader and Khasi Fourth Reader to the treasury of Khasi literature.

Others followed in the footsteps of these later writers and came out with their own books. Among the first non-missionary writers to take up the task of further developing Khasi literature, was another non-Khasi, S. M. Amjad Ali. In 1888 he brought out the first ever book of self-composed Khasi poems, Ka Myntoi Lane ka Kot Boit, and thus earned for himself the distinction of becoming the father of Khasi poetry After Ali, the precursor who called on the Khasi people to stand up and chart their own course of history, came what has been described by R. S. Lyngdoh 16 as "the great cultural revival at the turn of the centur, ushering for the first time, a coherent and purposeful challenge to the influence of Christianity and the missionaries' monopoly over intellectual and cultural affairs." This awakening was led by three erudite Khasi scholars. Rabon Singh Kharsuka, Jeebon Roy Mairom and Radhon Singh Berry Kharwanlang. Rabon Singh¹⁷ is reputed to be the first Khasi to ever write a book. Among him will be a book of the state a book. Among his well-known works are Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khui, a book about Niam Trai or Khasi indigenous faith, published between

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1897 and 1900, followed by Ka Kitab Jingphawar (1905), a collection of traditional gnomic verses and Ka Kot Jingiathuh Khana Puriskam (1908), a collection of folk stories and fairy tales. Jeebon Roy produced altogether a collection of folk stories and fairy tales. Jeebon Roy produced altogether 11 books including Ka Kitab Shaphang Uwei U Blei, a tract about one God, and the history of India in Khasi. Radhon Singh Berry came up with the still-popular Ki Jingsneng Tymmen, a collection of Khasi aphorisms. Others like Sib Charan Roy Dkhar, Morkha Joseph Chyne and Hormurai Diengdoh contributed with their works to broaden the circle of secular Khasi literature.

But because the schools were run by the missionaries, the outstanding efforts of Ali and the Khasi pioneers went largely unnoticed. According to the historians of Khasi literature, when Tham joined the Shillong Government High School in 1905 as a teacher in Khasi, he discovered that it was mostly religious texts like Ka Kitab U Joshwa (The Book of Joshua), Ka Kitab U Job (The Book of Job), Ka Kitab Ki Proverb (The Book of Proverbs), and others that had been prescribed for the Entrance or Matriculation Examination. The only exceptions to these were John Robert's Khasi Fourth Reader and Ka Kot Jingiathuh Khana Puriskam of Rabon Singh.

This state of affairs continued till 1919. During that time, as may be gathered, Khasi literature was still at a very incipient stage, and as most of the books written by non-missionary authors were not on the school curriculum all literary activities came to a sudden halt, leading to a sudden slump in the production of new texts. This meant that Tham and other teachers had to teach the same things repeatedly for about 14 years from 1905. For Tham, the bibliophile and conscientious educator, there could be nothing worse than this. In the preface to Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynniew Trep he confessed that he was quite fed up with having to "teach the same books over and over again for years." (P x) He added that even the students "were bored to death with having to read the same stuff from class VII to class X." (P xi)

In his book, Warjri¹⁹ confirms that Tham, who had tasted the sweet kernel of Khasi texts and who had realised the vast potential of the Khasi written word, could not accept this somniferous situation. At this point of time he was not aware that he would himself be called upon to shoulder the responsibility of promoting Khasi literature. He did not know that he had the talent or moral strength to do it. Indeed he did one day he would be using it in the most effective manner. His natural with them to write and bring out new books that could be incorporated

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in the syllabus. He had appealed to them many times but had received not so much as a hint that they had heard him: "...deaf were the ears of the wise (missionaries and Khasis)..." (P x) he wrote of their unresponsiveness in the preface. So what was he to do? He was at his wit's end. If the learned would not do it, who else would, or could? Was the seed of Khasi writings, sown by Thomas Jones and nurtured into a healthy sapling during the period of the cultural revival, to be stunted now by the combined inertia of his contemporaries? These were forlorn questions that furied him night and day and made his life miserable. He had been moved by the great moral teachings of Christianity in the translations of the missionaries. He had delighted in the splendour of traditional wisdom in the books of the Khasi scholars: was he to lose forever what he had once possessed? Was he not to see his own literature grow to the full height of its early promise?

In the grip of this awful *hiraeth*, he wrestled alone with his "longing like despair" until one day when strolling along the cliffs of Sunapan (Waterfall in the suburban west of Shillong), he heard this persistent whisper. "Do it yourself." But even this inspiration only brought him more misery and restlessness. How was he to go about it? When he thought of writing and poetry, he only saw a thick black cloud masking the path ahead, for after all, had he not confessed that "he had never known about Art or Poetry: foot, metre, rhyme, idea…?" It was only after losing sleep over the matter for weeks that he finally came to a decision.

One morning, Warjri relates, he marched into a classroom and proposed to his Class X students: "Young men, let us try our luck in writing our own books!" The class broke into a deafening roar as the students laughed at what they had thought was the best joke, of the morning. But their teacher was never more serious than at that moment. He called to one of the students to bring him the anthology of English poetry²⁴ they had been doing for so many years and told the whole class to translate (it is not clear, by chance or design) W.E. Hickson's nursery rhyme, "Drive the Nail Aright." The students thought their beloved Babu, for so they called him, had lost his mind. It was unthinkable for them to embark upon such a task. Warjri quotes Tham himself as saying "Some looked at the poem and scratched their heads; others tittered like a *shakyllia* [a type of bird], and still others sat with folded hands and drooping eyelids as if they were hearth stones." (P 54)

Meanwhile, Warjri goes on, Tham on his part sat in his chair with pen and paper in hand, lost in thought and straining hard to come up with a Khasi translation of the first line, "Drive the nail aright, boys" He remained in this posture of intense reflection for a space of ten

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minutes after which he triumphantly cried, Archimedes-like, "I have minutes and the fibre." (P 54) And there was another deafening found... I have found its toucher? found... as the class cheered its teacher's success. The fibre was "Sah beit roat as the prek, hep," from which Tham started working on the poem, as one would do when breaking a particularly knotty block of wood.

Having experienced the thrill of his first triumph, and now fully realising that he did have it in him the talent to write and create, his hiraeth grew in force and like Shelly's "West Wind," drove him forward as if to a predestined destiny. The end result was hugely satisfying. As Tham wrote in the preface, from this "mustard seed," that is "Sah beit ia 11 prek, hep," grew others, till gradually they evolved into "the branches and leaves" (P xiii) of Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep, his piece de resistance.

But Tham did not have an easy going of it. His onward course as a poet was slow and painful. Having sown his "mustard seed," he wanted, as he said in the preface, to "pursue onwards as if for a prize." (P xi) The prize that he sought was a fuller understanding of poetry and its intimidating paraphernalia, which had at first seemed to him "like a confused litter of cattle bones in the hills." This, he felt, was the only means through which he could fulfil his heart-burning desire to contribute, through poetry, to his literature and thus push it along the difficult path of progress. But he was impeded in his high objective by three things which Warjri lists as, "... His lack of education; his lack of travel; and his lack of assistance from Khasi literature." (P 57)

Since nothing much was happening in Khasi literature, especially in the field of poetry, Warjri reports that Tham had to take recourse to English poetry. But because of his rudimentary education, seeking enlightenment from the English world of letters must have been a very formidable task indeed. Warjri suspects that Tham must have struggled "like a farm bull to plod his way through English literature." (P 61) And struggled he did, for the hiraeth in his heart was a hunger, inappeasable, a fire, unrelenting. With a zest that would have done the most industrious schoolboy proud, he dug into the works of Shakespeare, Milton, the Romantic poets and any other he could lay his hands on, in his quest to discover what is prosody and the metrical laws of English poetry. Eventually, after three years of this gruelling ground-breaking, Tham was said to have felt confident enough to complete the translation of "Drive the Nail Aright" in 1922.

The extraordinary time taken by Tham to translate this little poem can be explained further by the manner of his translation. He had not only translated the words but had followed its metrical pattern to the

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letter. A comparison between the original and the translated version will bring out the similarities, at the level of form, more vividly:

Drive the nail aright, boys,

Hit it on the head;

Strike with all your might, boys,

While the iron's red.

When you've work to do, boys,
Do it with a will;
They who reach the top, boys,
First must climb the hill.

Standing at the foot, boys, Looking at the sky; How can you get up, boys, If you never try?

Though you stumble oft, boys,
Never be downcast:
Try and try again, boys,
You will win at last.

Drive the nail aright, boys,

Hit it on the head;

Strike with all your might, boys,

While the iron's red.

("Drive the Nail Aright")

The Khasi translation:

Sah beit ia u prek, hep, Ai na shata dar; Tangon eh taiñ-taiñ, hep, Myndang saw u nar.

Man ba trei jingtrei, hep,
Naduh mynsiem trei;
Ki ban poi sha kliar, hep,
Ban kiew lum ki dei.
Phai ka khmat shaneng, hep,
Sdang naduh ba sdang;
Kumno phin poi kliar, hep,
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("Sah Beit ia u Prek")

Both versions are written in four-line stanzas with the first and third lines of each stanza containing six syllables, while the second and fourth containing five. In both, the first stanza is repeated as a refrain at the end, while the rhyme scheme also follows a similar pattern of abab, acae, adad, aeae, and abab. All these points of comparison call attention to the fact that Tham had clearly succeeded in the task he had set out for himself, that is, to achieve an absolute understanding of English prosody. This is also borne out by later translations and original compositions arranged in the popular metrical designs of the day.

With the successful completion of this poem, Tham threw himself into his translation work with more vigour and translated a total of 10 English poems into Khasi. These include, among others, William Shakespeare's "The Passionate Pilgrim;" William Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems" and "The Solitary Reaper;" Lord George Gordon Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib;" Sir Walter Scott's "Patriotism;" and William Cowper's "The Diverting History of John Gilpin." These translations, in turn facilitated the composition of his own poems, which started as nursery rhymes and then matured to a more serious type of poetry as the poet gained in skill and aplomb. These were later collected together with the translations in Ki Poetry Khasi, afterwards to receive wide recognition and plaudit as Ka Duitara Ksiar.

It must be reiterated once again, however, that the emergence of Tham's first collection of poetry in 1925 was not at all a smooth ninemonth gestation. Later, Tham wrote in a number of his poems about these difficult beginnings: the loneliness, the exacting toils, the hardships, and the pain that he had to endure during his long and arduous search for the essence of poetry. Compounding the problems directly linked with Poetry writing, were a host of others, which nearly made the publication of this book impossible. Warjri recounts that the poverty that He was but a poorly paid schoolteacher and a widower with the was but a poorly paid schoolteacher and a widower with the who died prematurely in 1926. As if poverty was not obstacle enough

to discourage a man from the costly business of publishing books, there was, in those days, no financial support from the government for authors who wished to print their own books. Tokin Rymbai, 25 confirmed this when he wrote in the Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Birth Centenary Souvenir

> During the days of Babu Soso Tham, to write Khasi texts and have them printed was a very expensive affair. There was no grant from the Government to support and encourage authors as is the practice today... (P 77)

But the worst vexation for Tham and the writers of his day was perhaps the lack of readership. Readers form the backbone of literature. They are the sponsors who inspire writers to ever-greater feats. It is for this reason that the most developed literatures of the world are invariable those that command the interest and goodwill of the greatest number of people. But unfortunately for Tham, this was not the case with Khasi literature. Writing an introduction to Tham's Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynnico Trep, S. K. Bhuyan said:

> U Soso Tham has been born an age too early. His countrymen have not as yet been trained to appreciate the inner beauty of his poetry, nay of any poetry. In such an atmosphere even the most poetically-minded genius will languish for want of inspiration and stimulus for self-expression. (P vii)

It is because of this that Reverend Oliver Thomas²⁶ said in 1920: "It is not easy to publish books in this land. Most of those who had published earlier had lost quite a bit of money and, therefore, people are hesitant to write books." Even Tham had commented on this hopeless situation in his "Ka Tien Khmat" (preface) to Ka Duitara Ksiar.

> Hynrei u Khasi mynta um treh pule lymda phñian ha u ha skul bad ha ingmane. Bad ki khynnah kim pule ia ka kot Khasi, la ka bha katno katno, lymda ka ka dei ka Text Book. Don jingmatlah kaba kham thlip nalor kane? (P ii)

(But the Khasi today refuses to read unless compelled to do so at school or the church. And the young people do not read a Khasi book, however good it may be, unless it is a Text Book. Is there a blindness more opaque than this?)

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These queries have been partly answered earlier when hiraeth for his native tongue and literature has been ascribed as the poet's prime mover. But to face down all these traumatic experiences; to "depart from the familiar world" as he himself had written in the preface, and drudge on "in good health or in sickness—amidst the ups and downs of life, amidst scorn and praises;" (P xi-xii) the poet must have been motivated by a much greater compulsion than hiraeth for his language and literature.

Of himself and his poetry, the great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda,

Under the volcanoes, besides the snow-capped mountains, among the huge lakes, the fragrant, the silent, the tangled Chilean forest...I have come out of that landscape, that mud, that silence, to roam, to go singing through the world....²⁷

In a way, Neruda's confession can be used to discover the secret repertoire of Tham's strength as a poet. Like Neruda's poetry, it is out of an immense love for his land, his people, ²⁸ and all that they imply, that Tham's poetry had risen like a nourishing plant from a literary field that was degenerating into a dry and fallow patch. This was the implacable compulsion, which had driven Tham to the calling of a poverty-stricken poet and eventually, in his people's estimation, to greatness.

In his book, Warjri also speaks of the "pure and profound patriotism" of the poet. He notes, "The words of wisdom which are to his land." (P 71) In fact, Warjri insists that it was the poet's patriotic that had spawned many of the poems in Ka Duitara Ksiar and poetry, Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep. One who has gone through the

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works of Soso Tham will not hesitate to agree with Warjri, that it was indeed patriotism, the mother of all *hiraeths* that had been at the heart of his most powerful creative impulse. It is an emotion that reveals itself almost everywhere in his poems, in all its infinite varieties. It becomes not only the subject matter of his poetry, but truly its inspiring and sustaining power. It is this parent *hiraeth* that had gifted him the courage to embark on what must have seemed like a mad pursuit to his countrymen, and Don Quixote-like, "to dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow..."

End Notes

- 1 R. S. Lyngdoh, "A Review on Ki Sngi Ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep," Soso Tham Birth Centenary Celebrations Souvenir 1873-1973, ed. B. Chedrack Jyrwa (Shillong Souvenir Committee, 1973) 71.
- 2 Hynniew Trep' literally means 'Seven Huts,' but this is a proper name referring to the ancestors of the seven Khasi sub-tribes as explained in the lines that follow. The writer therefore chooses to retain the name as it is.
- 3 Hughlet Warjri, U Soso Tham bad ki Jingtrei Jong U (Shillong: Hughlet Warjn, 1980) 5.
- 4 This term should be taken in the Khasi context since the Khasi and Jainta Hills were under British rule and had not become a part of India till the signing of the Instrument of Accession by the different Khasi-Jaintia states in 1948. See I. Nongbri, Ka Histori Ka Ri Hynniewtrep (Shillong: I. Nongbri, 1982) 51.
- 5 A well-known Assamese writer, S. K. Bhuyan was the Vice-Chancellor of Gauhan University during Tham's time. For more of his comments on Tham see "Modern Khasi Literature," Studies in the Literature of Assam (Gauhan K. Bhuyan, 1956) N. pag.
- 6 The quotation is from a letter by Reverend Oliver Thomas, General Secretary of The Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, Liverpool (a.d.). See Minnette Sibon Tham, I Mabah Soso Tham (Shillong: Minnette Sibon Tham, 1990) Appendix iv.
- 7 The quotation is from R. R. Thomas's, "Opinion" printed as a foreword to Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynniew Trep, by Soso Tham. xviii. Prof. Thomas (1883-1959) was the younger brother of the distinguished statesman and first Khas Member of Parliament, Reverend J. J. M. Nichols Roy. After a brilliant cared as an academician, beginning with his lectureship in Philosophy at Scottsh Church's College, Calcutta (1914-16), he became the first and only Khasi Principle of Cotton College, Gauhati (1944-46). See Charles Thomas, "Roy Rowland Thomas, Eminent Educationist, Scholar and Teacher," Shillong Centenary Celebration (Shillong: Celebration Committee, 1976) 69-72.
- 8 The poem quoted appeared in the Penguin Book of Korean Poetry, Sam Jung, ed. and trans., (London: Penguin, 1986) 56.

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Inaugural address of J. F. Kennedy as President of the USA, 20 January 1961; Inaugural A. J. Cohen, The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations (London: J. M. and M. J. Cohen, 1980) 181 Penguin Books, 1980) 181. Penguin Door, 10 Penguin Brown appearing in Ka Duitara Ksiar, P 54-6 should not be mistaken with This poem appearing in Ka Duitara Ksiar, P 54-6 should not be mistaken with

the book, Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep. Welsh word loosely translated as longing for something once possessed. It weisir and the love-lost-longing or praise-lament-yearning syndrome in literature. 11 12 See 3 above. 54.

13 The summary is based on the following:

- R. S. Lyngdoh, Ka Histori ka Thoh ka Tar: Bynta II (Shillong: R. S. Lyngdoh, 1983) 131-7.
 - Hamlet Bareh, A Short History of Khasi Literature (Shillong: Hamlet Bareh, 1969) 49-72.
 - H. W. Sten, Khasi Poetry: Origin & Development (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1990) 93-221.
 - Kitbor W. Nongrum, Ki Nongthohkot Khasi: Bynta I & II (Shillong: Kitbor W. Nongrum, 1982).
 - Nigel Jenkins, "Thomas Jones and the Lost Book of the Khasis." The New Welsh Review 21 (1993): 56-82.

14 See 13 (v) above. 61.

15 John Roberts came to the Khasi Hills in 1871. Many Khasi scholars feel that the title of "the father of Khasi literature" belongs more properly to him as his literary contributions far outweigh that of the other missionaries."

16 See 13 (i) above. 83-84

17 This was according to R. S. Lyngdoh, writing in "U Pahep Rabon Sing Kharsuka," Soso Tham Birth Centenary Celebrations Souvenir 1873-1973. Details as 1 above. 35.

18 See 13 (i-iv) above.

- 19 See 3 above. 53. All biographical details from here on are from this book unless indicated otherwise.
- 20 Soso Tham, "Ki Symboh Ksiar," Ki Sngi ba Rim U Hynñiew Trep (Shillong: Primrose Gatphoh, 1976) 3.
- 21 Matthew Arnold, "Switzerland: To Marguerite Continued," The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language, ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1964) 364.

22 As revealed by the poet in the preface. x.

23 ibid. xi.

24 Proper title unknown.

25 Noted writer and leader of Seng Khasi, R. Tokin Rymbai was a student of Soso Tham.

26 Quoted by F. M. Pugh in his Ka Jingiarap ia ki Kot B. A. Khasi: Bynta III (Shillong;

F. M. Pugh, 1970) iv. See also 5 above. Pablo Neruda, Memoirs, trans. Hardie St. Martin (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1984) 5.

As stated earlier this 'love' must be taken in the Khasi context.

29 Record of the Context of t 29 From Joe Darion's song, "The Impossible Dream," as sung in Man of La Mancha, a television play by Dale Wasserman, based on Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra's Don Quixote de La Mancha. Source: http://www.manoflamancha. com/index2.htm

POETRY

Soso Tham

Pearls

Dew drops on the grass, In the morning they glitter; I too from home will depart To hunt for these pearls.

From the grass that is green They take off with the sun; Like them then I'll plunge To an unknown region.

The thorns though they prick In a faraway street; From home I'll depart And return long after.

The heart too will grieve Alone faraway; The tears that gather Are actually pearls.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

Stars

Look young men what lies ahead, That you may tell which way to step;

Ten Poems from Soso Tham's first poetry collection Ka Duitara Ksiar

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There's a star that leads the way,
Alive the name the glory stays.

Make an effort like other men,
Work not only for your subsistence;
But also that you may ascend,
From the very rungs of fame.

Or to pile up only wealth,
And your boundaries to spread;
Because long they can't remain,
Like reputation and a name.

Though you maybe small and weak,
Quietly if you have to weep;
Who will say you cannot claim,
Glory and a name.

Fear not if you have to plod,

Through the fire or through blood;

Only brave men who are game,

May reach the mountaintops of fame.

Though the sun beats down on you,
Soon the cool breeze you'll taste too;
It's in all that's done diligently,
That it lurks immortal glory.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

The Green Grass

Quietly in the wood,

It grows among the weeds;

An uncommon blossom, u tiew dohmaw,*

A thing of lofty thoughts.

A wild flower, symbol of great wisdom.

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Quietly by shadowy streams,

To be a fragrance when faded,

The joy-giving fern

Remains green for twelve moons.

Tell me twilight, beloved of the gods,
And you the motley clouds;
Tell me where is that star
That first speckles the sky.

Quietly he lives, quietly he dies,
Amidst the wilderness;
Quietly in the grave let him rest,
Beneath the green, green grass.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

The Pine Tree

The sun beats down on me,

The wind lashes at me;

To the sky the branches spread

Through the earth the roots thread.

Alone I am the forest,

Though all alone I rise;
The thoughts are lofty,

That swirl inside me.

That every man is wise,

That who can deny;

Yet without a break,

How can he even speak.

Of a sudden a branch snaps, All the town shivers; It is only a paragon, Who wins the love of all.

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It is only in a paragon,

That lies the will that lasts;

You may fault him all you can,

But how will you root him out.

Like him I too must go,

Like a man mightily must I fall;

Look, children of the earth,

Like this I'm standing tall.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

The Days that are Gone

I will go to n^1 Sohra to be among the hills, The land of *u tiew sohkhah* and *u tiew pawang lum*;² The land of *ka sim pieng*, the land of *u kaitor*,³ The land of valour, the land of culture.

Listen, in *ri* Sohra, that *iewbah*⁴ has arrived, It resonates the cheering that the archery may be won! It sinks into the caverns, from the sky too it creeps, To a Khasi, a Pnar, a Bhoi, or a War.⁵

Its cliff-edges too overflow without end,
With the torrent that roars, the breeze that's tender;
And the heart that's forever youthful hums in the woods,
Thus rumble the gorges of ri War and reverberate the boulders.

Long have I departed from relations and friends, Though others have gone, others linger on; Thus the honour of Sohra and its silver seas, Once more, once more, came dazzling to me.

¹ Country.

Orchids.

Songbirds.

Big market day.

Names of the sub-tribes of the Khasis.

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Thus the days that are gone, they surge and they surge, I don't know the beginning or where they would end; Only this I do know, that often I do want—Once more, once more to be a child.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

Trot

Trot was one among the breed

Of dogs where dwelled a rarity:

He had a body, strong and healthy,

He was nimble as the breeze.

Among the weeds he stalked the weaver birds,

He ran after the swallows in the sky;
Into the forest he also charged,

In the water he swam and splashed.

The most beloved friend of Trot
A casual labourer:
A poor man; he persevered
For the children and his wife.

With him he skipped and danced;
At last the time arrived,
The master must depart from home,
And from his friends, his dearest ones.

And so he could not take his friend along.
To another realm:
Through chasms and inhospitable lands,
Alone he walked, all by himself.

The realm mysterious, it is that,

It is somewhere and everywhere;

The unknown there, the terrible,

It has no taboo, cares for none.

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And from there, whosoever set foot in,
Young men or women;
Children, old ones, or infants,
They never did return.

And once they had crossed over,
One step into the edge;
They had no wish even for a fleeting look;
For nothing did they pine.

The world and its splendour,

The wealth that we treasure;

The youthful eye that loves all worldly things,

There they lose their meaning.

The eye of man would like to peer,
Into that deathly hush;
But the way to go there,
Is through the golden tears.

The agonizing mourning of man
Cannot find a resting stone;
They vanish the dirges that it moans
Into the wearying wastes.

So to the fore the master went,
Trot quietly by his side;
Behind his wife and weeping children,
Till the edge of a precipice.

What happened there, how he was mystified!

How else shall I describe;

Often he tried to plunge into the void,

Then to the house he fled.

He knew among them from then on,
Would cloak a darkness end to end;
That he tossed and whimpered restlessly,
The hearts turned to water completely.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Like others the days brightened,

Like others they would set;

Beneath the pines the master stretched,

Peacefully in the grave.

The swallow as always emerged,
From within the crevices;
But Trot alone he curled in grief,
Under the dripping porch.

The weaver bird and frisking deer
About the hills they ran:
Why wasn't Trot chasing them around!
Instead he slumbered on the ground!

Other generations yet will come,
Their monuments they will raise;
Will someone here and there,
Recall the memory of Trot!

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

U Tiew Pathai'

When I recall your memory,

To a distant world I flee;

For a lifetime shall I dwell in the wilds,

The land of fruits and plenty.

Like a mist-covered waterfall,
Hiding its features;
I too, to other years,
Alone with falling tears.

Time flies, scuttles in a hurry, When in your company; Neve

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^{*} Literally a message-bearing flower, an orchid with a strong sweet scent.

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Never shall I forget now, In other days than those.

Though you have sunk beneath the earth,
A thousand times you will emerge;
U tiew-pathai on soggy ground,
From a distance bequeaths its fragrance.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

The Air is Still Fragrant

As if from a vision I wakened, When I had my first sight;
From the sun that was hot,
Alone how she sat;
Though I knew her not,
Or, what her name was;
It was in her that on earth
I sought a heaven.

Like the rose that's hidden
In its own leaves;
That has its head bent,
In the air that's fragrant;
I loved more than mother,
And sweet was the name;
It was with her that on earth,
I savoured a heaven.

During days that were clear,
When the breeze too was cool;
When the grass was still green,
And the flowers were swinging;
To the slopes and the shades,
We strolled and wandered;
A little away from people,
It was there the heaven.

nt.

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The rose is still hidden
In its own leaves;
It still has its head bent,
And the air is still fragrant;
Though she has gone far away,
Together with her name;
To another world,
To another heaven.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

The Bird that Is Free

Just when I was falling asleep, from a land faraway Once not so long I listened to a song; It was all very clear—the melodious voice, The only daughter who had crossed the divide.

Often I had walked the days dark with cloud; Yet from the lap of nature I received afterwards Days that are cool and the sky that is clear, When tired, and down came the tears.

Often I had listened to the bee as it flew, To the songbird too, as it folded its wings; In the lap of nature that they hummed melodious: Ecstatic my soul and lofty my thoughts.

Forever did I love the hills that were hushed, Often too I had watched the stream; As it quarried its pools and carried off the gravel, Thus I returned to my home to finish off my tasks.

The bird is now free and it sings from the thorn: Why should I mourn for days that have gone; I'll seek every time for the songs that are pure, That are found everyday only in the fold of nature.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih 160 / Indian Literature: 235 The

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The Cipher on the Stone

When still in my father's and mother's lap,
Though I survived on the herbs, the world yet was flat;
I bragged, I scorned, I daydreamed as a child;
I laughed, I cackled, to be good I could not.

When the river clamoured that it boiled without stop; When I watched the grass that was green; Like a hip-hopping bird inspecting itself, I enquired: "Tell me o death, where do you live?"

Like a sturdy fruit tree that unfurled its branches, When seasoned, and the thoughts had broadened; That daydream later came to be seen, As one of the ciphers etched on the stone.

The grass is now tanned that the river has ebbed, It is then that I see—a mysterious Something that it comes; The tongue is now tied and I cannot open my mouth, Sunken in deep thought that winter has arrived.

Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih

Mahabharat and Environment

Dileep Jhaveri

Inventing a perpetual present from history, tradition or Imagination and extending it to a future for all times, enables a literary work to evolve into a classic. Constructed from a recognizable local setting an ever enlarging space is created that remains permanent and universal. Drawing substance from the contemporary life the classics appear convincing but they become eternal because of the thrust derived from the fundamental questions that they ask. The classics raise more questions than the answers they provide. Generations after generations and in lands for apart they keep growing like forests adding a variety of frondescence they inspire and nurse.

Conceived by an adivasi fisherman on a riverbank in sylvan surroundings a tale expanded to an epic that is *Mahabharat*. Poets, versifiers, chroniclers, intellectuals, pedants, scholars, dogmatists, liberals, frauds, rural as well as urban bards went on adding to it. This was already anticipated by the dark adivasi poet dwelling on an island with an accommodating spirit and aptly named Vyas:

आचख्युः कवयः केचित् सम्प्रत्याचक्षते परे आख्वासन्ति तथैवान्यै इतिहासिममं भुवि

Reflected in *Mahabharat* are changing times of socio-politico-cultural-moral upheavals. The main body of *Mahabharat* bears evidence to this and its polymorphic manifestations are observed in several regions languages and civilizations of Asia. This polymorphism transcends time and space. Its dynamism sustains life-traditions and nourishes imagination. *Mahabharat* continues inspiring us even today because it inquires into human nature, human relationships, man's links with Universe and God, and an individual's place within the defined society and indefinable self. Containing

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several contradictions it is simultaneously deterministic and existentialistic.

An insulted woman and defiled earth are at the centre of the narrative.

Thus the contemporary issues of Feminism and Environment are cardinal in Mahabharat.

Reclaiming from collective memory environmental disasters of floods, glaciers, fires or volcanic eruptions cannot provide creative opportunities for an existentialist writer. There must be human involvement. Krishna Dwaipayan Vyas intentionally designs a situation of a clash between two civilizations after settling his matured principal characters in their placid daily life.

There is a self contained, peaceful, sylvan civilization in harmony with Nature. It is ruthlessly invaded by expansionist, urban, technologically advanced power, violent in nature. Khandav Van is set afire by Arjun and Krishna Vasudev as coveted by Agni.

Even when consented to in an inebriated state this act of Arjun and Krishna Vasudev is a willing act, a matter of choice. And from this choice consequences will follow inevitably and severally.

To protect Khandav Van Indra leads the entire pantheon of Gods. The adjectives used for Indra and references to his weapons evoke several prior myths, legends and perhaps actual history. His friendship with Takshak the chief of Nags or serpent tribe could well be an earlier historic pact of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the force of urbanizers and power of primitives.

The weapons gifted to Arjun and Krishna Vasudev also may have historical significance as references are made to there earlier employment. In their audacity to challenge the supremacy of Indra his son Arjun and Krishna Vasudev, as incarnation of Vishnu who is Indra's younger brother, destroy not only the forest but a vaster ecological balance of cultures, history and mythology. Vyas describes in unsparingly vivid details and with intense sensitivity the carnage and the futile efforts to frustrate it. There is a deep, seething anger terminating into profound, paralytic pathos. Incensed and with revulsion at the senseless atrocity and repeatedly benumbed with sadness for the life destroyed, it is not easy to read the text without breaking down repeatedly. Henceforth unconcealed irony will accompany in addressing Arjun as Anagh—pious, without sin, and Krishna Vasudev as Veer Mahatma—brave and noble soul.

From stripping the earth of her forest it is only a short distance the disgrace. What may be justifiable is not necessarily inevitable.

Since neither human behaviour nor the course of events is designed with mathematical elegance, baroque determinism can always stake a claim

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to legitimacy. So a reluctance to commit an act does not acquit one from suffering unexpected but definite consequences. Sabha Parva succeeding suffering unexpected but the Khandav holocaust highlights human vanity and underlines inescapable

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Yudhishthir is the procrastinating hero presiding precariously and yet proudly over capital Indraprastha, approvingly eulogized by the sages in comparision with several other establishments of the Immortals. Flattered thus he is goaded to perform validating Rajasooya Yajnya. The farsighted adivasi grandfather of the extinctive Kuru dynasty furtively advises against But the divine Krishna Vasudev overtakes the immortal Krishna Dwaipayan and the die against the mortal hero Yudhishthir is cast.

After engaging lesser rulers in futile battles to defeat them, decisively destroying defiant adversary of Krishna Vasudev that was Jarasandh and asserting indirectly over Antioch and Rome Yudhishthir pleasurably accepts rewards of environmental exploitation. Presented to him by royalties are gold, silver, jewels lacerated from the loins of the earth; horses, elephants, camels bereaved from her bosom; incense and resins peeled from her pelt; numberless nubile virgins nabbed from their nests and decked but in slavery. Not withstanding this effrontery there is further egregious excoriation of the environment. Species after species of wild life are slaughtered to obtain skins—tigers, deer, antelopes. The most reprehensible gift comes from the ruler of Kamboj offering purses and shawls woven from the down of birds and cats!

Engaged to keep an inventory of these presents was none other than Duryodhan, the classical cousin appointed by Yudhishthir himself Here is a perfect mirror situation where indiscriminate acquiescence is reflected as indomitable avarice.

This juxtaposition is an opportunity to set a stage where unruly, impulsive and obdurate violation of Khandav Van and the avalanche of the abominable offerings at Rajsooya can be counterpoised by a carefully crafted catastrophic choreography to castigate peripatetic Arjun and prevaricating Yudhishthir both by a mere throw of dice. Yet to be punished, the omniscient Krishna Vasudev's absence from the scene is assured by engaging his omnipotence for avenging the molester of Dwarika, demon Shalva of Saubhnagar.

The disgrace of menstruating Draupadi (to remain barren in future) is as revolting and tragic and poignant as disgracing the fertile earth that is most holy to the distribution is most holy to the Adivasi poet. For him the aim is not retribution but the demonstration of equivalence of both the acts of decadent civilization. Gibe and the decadent civilization. (Like enslaved Draupadi the earth too is abandoned by the Creator)

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The protagonists of power and the intellectual accessories of urbanization are unable to answer Draupadi's simple question: What is Dharma, the right way to preserve integrity and honour of life? Herein we realize that dishonour of Draupadi was not a revengeful motive of the Poet but a pointer of a parallel that was incomprehensible to the power hungry, wealth worshipping, environment exploiting, so called progressive consumerist society.

Like his predecessor Valmiki, Vyas is also fond of conveying his characters to forest for short sojourns or long exiles. Bringing them close to nature integrates and develops them. Even as punishment the stay in forest brings out the best in Pandu. After his death Vyas advises his own mother Satyavati and her daughters-in-law to retire to the woods to escape the unbearable loss and loneliness in Hastinapur with prophetic words: पृथ्वि गतयौवना

To Yudhishthir the forest provides an opportunity for reflection and maturity, and for Dhritarashtra the final tranquility in fiery dissolution. The inspired depictions of Nature, trees, flowers, birds, beasts and seasons, even though repeatedly borrowed from Ramayan revitalize the largely didactic language and reanimate the prolific narrative.

The strident poet of Hastinapur turns subtle in forest retaining his focus on environment. Banished to Kamyak Van Yudhishthir still has to support a large retinue of Brahmins that followed him. Everyday the four brothers go hunting in four directions. The wild life is getting decimated. One night the animals appear in a dream to Yudhishthir and beg him to spare them. He agrees and shifts to Dwaitavan. Promptly Vyas visits him and endows Pratismriti Vidya to him. This disguised blessing dramatically unveils the monumental tragedy of war in Stree Parva. After being cursed by Gandhari for his non-challance Krishna Vasudev is profusely abusive of Gandhari and womanhood in general, stunning everybody into silence. To break the impasse blind Dhritarashtra inquires Yudhishthir about the outcome of war. Prompt comes his reply aided by the ability to recall: One thousand sixty six million and twenty thousand dead, twenty four thousand one hundred and sixty five lost. These absurdly exact figures acquire a contextual significance with the unaccounted for loss of the wild life earlier. Justice is not a simple geometrical equation but a manifestation of the evolutionary process, that is a firm assertion by Krishna Dwaipayan Vyas.

The poet simultaneously has a rare and subtle sense of humour for articulating his concerns for environment. On two occasions a younger brother is admonished or advised by elder brother to desist from damaging Nature. While fetching golden lotus for Draupadi considerable havoc is

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wrought by Bhim to the forest and forest guards of Kuber. On his return, obstructed by an old monkey, he is enraged further and frustrated finally. The prank is thoroughly enjoyed by Hanuman the elder brother, its full magnificence he has some words of advice for Bhim. He is asked to desist from plucking flowers. Again during the year of concealment at the end of the exile in Viratnagar there is an attack by Trigart ruler. Yudhishthir desires to assist the guardian king with the help of his brothers. Bhim is ready as ever. He volunteers to uproot a mighty tree and bash up the enemy army. Yudhisthir counsels against such a weapon lest it might reveal their identity. This is a genial way to advise the stormy son of Wind god to preserve the environment.

Accomodating by nature, Mahabharat has ample space for centuries to grow within it. This has resulted in several additions and alterations in main narrative. Diverse stories, anecdotes, instructions, admonitions, propaganda, kitsch, litter are dumped over its generosity. Carrying such enormous freight the epic has still remained vibrant. Mahabharat has achieved a literary ecological equilibrium that is symbolic of all-inclusive culture of Bharat. The original narrative is a warning to the exclusionists then and now, in the spirit of democracy and freedom that we find in the order of Nature where unicellular life and blades of grass and tall trees and birds, beasts, water-life and human beings coexists on the same scale. Centered on an all embracing ideal and extending the freedom of existence to every one, Mahabharat with the burden of plenty and our culture with the burden of poverty have survived till today.

Recommendations to plant trees, tend gardens, save forests, dig wells are scattered all over Mahabharat promising a place in heaven. Flora and Fauna and Birds and Water life are rejoicingly recounted in the style of Ramayan. While Valmiki employs musical, Vyas prefers pictorial power of the language. Vyas has a vast and tragic vision to describe.

Before the start of the war Vyas visits his blind son Dhritarashtra and prophecies the impending calamity. Try to imagine the world after some colossal nuclear disaster. Right from minute genetic mutations far reaching astronomical disorders are predicted: Multiple suns in the sky, dim, red, burning, black; solar and lunar eclipses; aberrant gyrations of planets and constellations; deranged seasons, rains of burning stones, dust storms, flaming meteorites, volcanic eruptions, drying rivers, overflowing oceans; rice plants each bearing several spikes of inferior grain, unexpected fruits on alien trees, monstrous animals, cows giving birth to hogs, precocious puberty of girls, eight year olds delivering deformed progeny that start incest right from birth.

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This is a vision that can inspire scores of science fiction films. Devastation of environment on multiple scales spreads over earth, galaxies, perastation of environment on multiple scales spreads over earth, galaxies, morality, mythology. And the cause is human greed. At a later genes, morality, mythology. And the cause is human greed. At a later genes, morality, mythology. And the cause is human greed. At a later genes, morality, mythology. And the cause is human greed. This date yudhishthir actually confesses to a desire of possessing Duryodhan's wealth in the game of dice that dealt the disastrous blow. This desire to possess has blurred the difference between right and wrong. Dharma has been abandoned by both sides. This dark prophecy has lost not the least relevance today. That is why Mahabharat remains contemporary even now. The message is simple: Take care of the environment and give up greed.

Even the poet of tragic Vyas is not a cynic. Even as he rebels against and attempts to sabotage plans of self proclaimed Creator and Destroyer of Life (occasionally Krishna Vasudev is kept in suspense by Krishna Dwaipayan by poetic subterfuge) he asserts his faith in life in the face of destruction. He paints war in its gory vividity of death and vivid glory of life. His giddy imagination produces swirling pictures.

The battlefield is overcast with dark clouds, eclipsed sun and moon, menacing planets, evil comets and ominous constellations; dark and bloody rain cascades, burning pallets shower from the sky; vultures, jackals and wolves crowd around; the horses neigh with fear, elephants trumpet in distress, they also urinate and defecate with fright; with such ill omens rivers of blood flow in Kurukshetra and dark slime smears everything.

This is the sinister back drop of Death.

And now the Poet of faith in life begins to paint.

The severed heads of warriors float like shining lotuses in the bloody river; their hair spread like rippling duckweed; limbs of horses and elephants spin like turtles, sharks, alligators; a warrior adorned with wounds is resplendent like a Palash tree in blossom; a dying hero falls from his chariot like a Champak tree uprooted from a cliff by storm; before his death Drona stands erect in his chariot, with every part of his body pierced by quivering arrows shining in the last rays of the sun, like a tree in monsoon evening lit up by fire flies.

And suddenly you realize that in the face of death the poet is asserting living images of life itself. And this Life is trees and flowers and birds and fishes and eternity.

While painting the picture of war Krishna Dwaipayan is at his best in depicting the death of Karna. It recalls the clash between two earlier cultures when Indra the rain and thunder god established his supremacy over universal sun god. Indra's son Arjun vanquishes Soorya's son Karna. The sun is setting in glorious red colours and clouds are gathering. Shalya describes the twilight scene of battlefield in its tragic resplendence

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to Duryodhan. In that large chapter four lines on dying horses are

शरावभिनै: पतितैस्तुरंगमै: श्वसद्भिरार्तै: क्षतजं वमद्भि: दीनं स्तनद्भिः परिवृत्तनेत्रै र्मरीं दशद्भिः कृपणं नददभिः

The wounded and fallen horses breathe with difficulty, spew blood moan piteously, with eyes rolling bite at the earth, whimper pathetically Between two pillars of the sound of moaning and whimpering, on the bitten earth an arch is erected envisioned by the circling gaze. The fragility of life is enduringly supported by the empathy of the poet deeply sensitive to the suffering of the horses. These are the same horses that draw the chariot of sun. These are the horses that symbolize life force. These horses like us are part of the same universal continuity. Vyas is a universal poet and Mahabharat is a universal epic. Mahabharat has no need to be superior to other epics for proving its validity, Vyas has no need to belittle any poet from past or future to be great because the dark, islander Vyas is all the poets writing together from one point of circle to the other end. Mahabharat has kept a count of all: you, me, birds, beasts, trees, leaves, blades of grass, grains of dust. These are the original numbers of stanzas in Mahabharat, which is the largest poem, as large as this earth that belongs to everyone. This earth is धूलि and we are fortunate that ए धुलाते तिलक पडे छि भाले.

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Rethinking the Nation

Satish C. Aikant

Tation as a contested category has received widespread attention resulting in several recent critiques of 'nation' and 'nationalism'. However, these critiques are mostly informed by western historiography, so that it is invariably made out as if nation, arising out of a nebulous state, has to be "imagined into existence". Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an 'imagined community,' born with the demise of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. For postcolonial critics this definition, however, is not unproblematic since while referring to constructions of nation and nationalism with regard to Third World countries Anderson underlines their dependency on the European models with the contention that the American and European experiences 'were now everywhere modularly imagined.' In the colonies, wherever the native intelligentsia played a crucial role in mobilizing support against the colonial powers, it was given out as if the anti-colonial nationalism was itself made possible and shaped by European political and intellectual history. The received history of nationalism argues for two kinds of nationalism: Eastern and Western. By the logic of this Us-Them divide, Western nationalisms are deemed capable of generating their own models of autonomy from within, whereas Eastern nationalisms have to assimilate something alien to their own cultures before they can become modern nations.

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain modular forms already made available to them by Europe and the America, what are they left with to imagine? Even our imaginations must remain forever colonised. The real tragedy, however, occurs when postcolonial nationalisms internalise rather than problematize the Western blueprint in the name of progress, which, however, seems difficult to avoid since the immediate history of these nations happens to be Western, and there are no easy ways available to

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reclaim a pure and uncontaminated history prior to the ravages of

To break away from this debilitating paradigm Partha Chatterjee draws a distinction between nationalism as a political movement, which challenges the colonial state, and nationalism as a cultural construct, which enables the colonised to posit their difference and autonomy. The former is 'derivative' but the latter draws its energies from other sources. Chatterjee points out that the official histories of Indian nationalism would in fact correspond to Anderson's thesis. His argument is that anti-colonial nationalism attempts to create its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society. It does so by diving the world into a material, outside sphere constituted of the economy, statecraft, science and technology, and a spiritual, inner domain of culture (which includes religion, customs and the family). The supremacy of the West is conceded in the material domain, whereas the spiritual world is claimed as the essence of national culture, one that must be protected and defended. The more the colonised peoples imitate Western skills in the former sphere, the greater the need to protect the latter:

> The bilingual intelligentsia came to think of its own language as belonging to that inner domain of cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out; language therefore became a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world.2

The assertion of a spiritual or inner core thus becomes the site for the construction of national identities across a wide political and ideological anti-colonial spectrum. Ernest Renan in his essay "What is a Nation?" (1882) had stressed a similar position that 'a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle'.3 The communities that are imagined by anti-colonial nationalism often invoke a shared past or a cultural essence that is regarded as synonymous with a religious or racial identity.

It is interesting that when Nehru wrote his book on India, he called it The Discovery of India, for he was conscious of the fact that he was making a discovery, and not an invention, in the sense of an intellectual or imaginative construction. After his westernised upbringing and with a mind that matured in the West, he does get a cultural shock when confronted with the Indian reality, but he frankly confesses it, and emerging that out of his alien self, he identifies himself with his roots, knowing that in order to participate in the great drama of Indian freedom movement

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and to have the 'tryst with destiny', he would have to integrate himself and to have the 'tryst with destiny', he would have to integrate himself into the Indian ethos, without forsaking his intellectual refinements. So even his avowed agnosticism does not obstruct him from appreciating the Indian values, the civilizational greatness of India, and the cultural traditions it has fostered down the ages. His last Will and Testament is remarkable document which shows where his heart really was.

What is ironic about the entire approach of the western idea of progress and modernity, as well as their linear models, is that in their flagging moments they had to incorporate the so-called ahistorical, mythical and cyclical (but organic) patterns of non-western cultures. The Other became important for the re-definition of western societies and cultures. Perhaps, in their bid for survival, they needed the radical support of the potent, vibrant and regenerative attributes that were being lost in the wake of the failure of the Enlightenment project, and the construction of the Other was their historical necessity. With the decline of the Enlightenment, its legacy was taken up by Orientalism that saw its hevday during the ascendancy of imperialism. This collusion was broken by anticolonial movements that in turn bolstered nationalism. But the invidious attempts to perpetuate western hegemony continue to this day, so much so that Frederic Jameson discredits 'nationalism' in the third world countries by registering its disappearance from the First World. Harish Trivedi makes an interesting point that it was "like some harmful drugs which the First World safely banned from its own consumption"4 to make the Third World the dumping ground. Observations such as Jameson's are characteristic of the myopia of the western academics, who altogether ignore the historical context in which nationalism was consolidated in the Third World countries, and which gained strength not just on account of the acceptance of western liberal tradition in these countries, but mainly because of a fiercely anti-imperial stand. It is often maintained that British education helped forge nationalism in India. But surely that was not the avowed aim of colonial education. It no doubt provided a certain thematic based on British liberal doctrines, but it could not be automatically translated practice, given the exigencies of colonial economy. There were also those who saw British literary education as unmitigated blessing for the hadred while the British were at their 'civilizing mission', and even the bhadraloka of Bengal were no less charmed by it. Bankim Chandra, afull-fledged nationalist himself, was ambivalent in his attitude to imperialism. On the one hand he was enamoured of their rationality, material prosperity, science and industrialization, and on the other in his aspiration for nationalism he found spiritualism as the core Indian value. Such dichotomy of the material and the spiritual which privileged the latter provided rationale

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for 'essentialism' which was perfectly in consonance with the objectives of the British colonial power. To say that India was predominantly spiritual and otherworldly was to provide justification for the material expansion of the West and give it a free rein to exploit indigenous material resources Further, a native sense of identity was construed as the idea of modernity according to western paradigms. So that nations like India were forced to choose between "being themselves" and "being modern nations" as though the universal standards of reason and progress were natural to the West. The consequent universalising mission was carried out with violence, coercion, and deracination. We can see how this projection perpetrates the ideology of a dominant common world where the West leads naturally and the East follows in an eternal game of catch up where its identity is always in dissonance with itself. Such a neat distinction between the spiritual and the material, in effect, does not exist. Even a cursory glance at India's historical past will reveal that a holistic approach has characterised its world-view in which the tenets of dharma, artha, kama and moksha are interwoven. Yet it is also true that the core value of Indian tradition remained spiritualism, and this is the aspect which was highlighted by Bankim to score over the overtly western materialism. It was when the Indians overlooked their dharma that they unwittingly helped the cause of imperial expansion. We may recall Gandhi's warning

> The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them....Recall the Company Bahadur. Who made it Bahadur? They had not the slightest intention at the time, of establishing a kingdom. Who assisted the Company's officers? History testifies that we did all this.5

Gandhi had no patience with the elitist view which held in doubt that India was existing as a nation:

> The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom and subsequently divided us. (132-33)

Further, he does not believe in the divisibility principle:

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India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. (136)

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Nehru, despite his different perceptions, but with more historical sense, saw nothing inherently superior about the West to categorise it sharply in juxtaposition with the East:

I do not understand the use of the words Orient and Occident, except in the sense that Europe and America are highly industrialized and Asia is backward in this respect. This industrialization is something new in world history. There is no organic connection between Hellenic civilization and American civilization.⁶

In other words, Europe and America's industrial progress was in no way affiliated to, or consequent upon the Hellenic civilization. It merely occurred at a disjunction of history. Ironically, such industrial progress was denied to a colonial country like India because it did not suit the interests of the colonial powers. But this lack of material progress among Indians was attributed to their spiritual preoccupation and otherworldly outlook. It was a strange twist to the western man's appropriation of nature. Subsequently, the science of nature became a paradigm for all social sciences, the key word being control—control of nature, and by extension, the control of human agency. Knowledge, then, became embedded in power, and power became self-legitimising. Control of (colonial) man, ostensibly to 'civilise' him became the summum bonum of rationality of the western man's mission.

The colonial period had a doubly demoralizing effect on India—there was plunder of its material resources, and there was a disruption of cultural awareness that weaned people away from their moorings.

Nehru was to remind his people about their own traditions:

There seemed to me something unique about the continuity of a cultural tradition through five thousand years of history, of invasion and upheaval, a tradition which was widespread among the masses and powerfully influenced them.⁷

Satish C. Aikant | 173

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chemical The Street Str dynamism there is an abiding component of tradition:

> Tradition has to be accepted to a large extent and adapted and transformed to meet new conditions and ways of thought, and at the same time new traditions have to be built up.(53)

It is obvious that neither Gandhi nor Nehru defines 'nation' simply in terms of spatial coherence, but in terms of 'people'—their civilizational unity, their beliefs, and common cultural heritage. The unity, again, does not grow out of the imposition of a monolithic order, but out of the freedom for acceptance and rejection, and that is why even in the mids! of the rigidities of ritualistic religions and orthodoxy, the heterodox systems have coexisted on the soil of India. The medieval saint poets in their playful subversion underlined the essential humanitarian strands in the core doctrines of various Hindu and Muslim sects, and it is they who forged the bonds of unity across the length and breadth of this country. It is, again, such nationalistic 'voices' which, though emerging from their historical specificities and firmly grounded in the local cultures, gain acceptance outside their boundaries, for they speak for mankind that neither the nation nor the race can restrict. The concept of humanity is not altogether abstract. It takes its starting step from nationality itself and transcends it in its culminating moments. Nation, then, is prior to everything and is an originating principle, and it is national culture that helps mould specific peoples and individuals. These notions are interconnected and it is only when the individuals have received imprint of their culture that they can graduate to humanity. The gradual absorption of the external, shapes the individual in all dimensions in a process of cultural symbiosis. This is what has given resilience to Indian character. Individuals as nationalised subjects, then, appear not in hierarchical order, but transparent and equal to one another. It is a mistaken belief that unity of a nation is incumbent upon homogeneity. On the other hand, national spirit or character also allows for coexistence of various contradictory tendencies and it is also the spirit of scepticism that gives a society a dynamic way of life.

All such (inter)national figures as Shakespeare, Goethe, Kalidasa and Sankara, though emerging on particular social space at particular historical moments, transcended their circumstances as their works embody 'universal truths'. This is a second of the second truths'. This is true of some of our modern writers such as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan whose appeal is not related to an anxiety for cosmopolitanism, or in subsuming the local into the universal, but for

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rising above these categories. Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah finds in such rising above "suffused throughout with traditional values." It is writers a modernity "suffused throughout with traditional values." It is writers a microstation and nationalism begin to dissolve their in such writings hegemonies.

If we look at the canonical writings and the critical discourses, we can easily notice how literature, too, operated through different social spaces in different national formations employing various signifying practices, but the crux of the matter is that only those texts have been canonized that legitimate nationhood. In the Indian context, the age-old values have found expression in our canonical works.

The recurring myths of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have provided themes and formal patterns to our literatures down to the contemporary novels written in English, a comparatively late entrant into the Indian literary scene. The novel, European in its form, uses several subtexts of our mythic lore, and even the contemporary works cannot avoid them, as has been done by Shashi Tharoor in The Great Indian Novel. Much of the fabulation of the contemporary Indian writing stems from indigenous resources, be it Arabian Nights or the latakas. Even the Indian diasporic writers with their mandatory Indian connection and condescending attitudes would be starved of their themes if they did not hark back to their tenuous roots-not much unlike our colonial marauders who exploited native resources for uses abroad. And yet we have a Bharati Mukherjee vehemently calling herself an 'American Novelist' and a Vikram Seth whose A Suitable Boy is debunked by Salman Rushdie as a 'great Indian soap' though perhaps Rushdie wanted to highlight his own 'magic realism' (whatever that may mean; 'magic', one would imagine, has a profoundly transforming quality. Whether Rushdie's works qualify this criterion is anybody's experience).

Rousseau maintained that love of mankind was nothing but love of justice, and we could extend this axiom to include the love of one's own country. I use the word 'country' to situate it prior to nation-state that was a later development. Nationalism in this sense is also a cultural prerogative. It is in fact the cultural differentiations that fix identities at a particular political or historical juncture. But to maintain that 'nation' came into existence only at a specified historical moment is to deny a whole people their collective memory. This idea militates against the non-Western cultures which privilege traditions and view modernity not as a disjunction or an imposition but as an evolution through a dynamic process of selection and rejection. Nation, therefore, develops not as an excress. excrescence but embodies growth of communal experience. To reject nation is to disown a heritage. By the same logic an absolute rejection,

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or refusal to discriminate between nationalisms, would be to cut oneself off from an effective cultural engagement, or what could be the problem off from an effective cultural, to cut him off from effective political action

The idea of nationhood is not a cultural apotheosis. It is only that it acquires a political edge to formally bind together disparate elements and within the multiplicities in a national formation, a dialectic constantly works to polarise and synthesize the different cultural strands that finally takes it to world culture, or to what Raymond Williams calls 'anew planetary consciousness'.

One reason why 'nation' is construed as an imaginary construct is that the West believed that it was not something that could be scientifically defined, and that for its very existence it depended upon an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature played a decisive role, so that the rise of European nationalism was also seen as coeval with particularly the rise of the Novel. In the non-western cultures, however, and particularly in India, the rise of the novel/initially took up the white man's burden and was faced with the problem of containing in its form a thematic that was not western, and of conveying the collective experience as against the western individualism, something that could never be accepted as a value in the Indian context.9

There is need to decolonise and to disabuse ourselves of such myths as 'civilizing mission' and 'dark continent' (Naipaul's variant for India as 'An Area of Darkness') which constituted the conceptual armoury of imperialism to subjugate major chunks of the globe. Substituting one form of hegemony by another is no freedom. One doesn't have to be a votary of Foucault to see the role of power in various interrelations; such power-plays are so pervasive that each individual experiences them, and if he is sensitive enough, knows their oppression. Ashis Nandy warns us about the subtle invasion:

> It is now time to turn to the second form of colonization, the one which at least six generations of the Third World have learnt to view as a prerequisite for their liberation. This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.10

Nationalism should result in a double decolonisation. Mere political decolonisation and the resultant celebration of freedom however moment

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tous, does not by itself inaugurate a new history, a new subject and a tous, does new and free sense of agency. It is of vital importance that nationalist thought coordinate a new and different space that is not complicit with thought the universal subject of Eurocentric Enlightenment; a space where nationalist politics could fashion its own epistemological, cognitive, and representational modalities.

With Marshal McLuhan's prophetic vision of a global village now nearer than ever before, caught as the world is in the tentacles of everwidening communication networks and multinationals at our doorsteps, everybody will share Nandy's anxiety but few would know how to get out of the clutches of the 'intimate enemy'. Is it possible to find a solution and devise strategy for decolonisation with our intellectual tools fabricated and honed at the western academy? Gandhi, one of the most original minds of this century, of course, had a way. He would keep the windows of his house open to all incoming winds, but refused to be blown off his feet. Some of Gandhi's prescriptions may be redundant, but his mode of resistance to the western dominance retains its validity.

Rethinking the nation requires of us to inquire into the existing social structures and ideological postures, to reinstate relationships and institutions that give coherence to cultural unity, which is often disarticulated through a post-structuralist contention that there is no direct, extra-discursive access to the real-ignoring the fact that the direct does not exhaust the real and that it must carefully negotiate with the non-discursive, at times even leave the field to it. We must come to terms with all inclusiveness, which is not only the most important characteristic of culture, but also provides the much needed confidence to 'nation', that frees it from any hegemonic representation.

Notes

Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.7.

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^{1.} The historical bias is apparent going by the titles of works by the western scholars or those informed by the western historiography. See for instance, Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983); Ronald Inden, Imaging India (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Ainslie T. Embree, Imaging India: Essays on Indian History (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India". of India", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, eds., Subaltern Studies VII (Delhi: Oxford University Press) 1992. See also Tom Nairn, Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited (London: Verso, 1997).

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- See Meenakshi Mukherjee, Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- 10. Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.xi.



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Home and Homelessness in The Hungry Tide: A Discourse Unmade

Saswat S. Das

A mitav Ghosh's novel The Hungry Tide is about relationships, which Aare configured around metaphors of 'home' and 'homelessness'. Though nowhere in his narrative the author sounds judgemental, he would like to present the uniqueness of his diasporic experience, whose credibility and authenticity have been challenged from several quarters, particularly by those who claim to be more genuine in their narration of local experiences due to their rootedness, for a large period of time, to a specific milieu, which, while triggering off a series of experiences, both contextual and reductive, shapes the identities of those writing within it. The irony however lies in the fact that the author while pretending to make space for his fiction beyond the post modern debate, which cruises endlessly on the fluidity of our conditions, shaped and enhanced by the radical geopolitics of the new age, has displayed 'homelessness' as the natural condition of man. The author, while speaking for himself, has thosen to make space for those, who, unlike him, have been writing from and within the centre especially the postcolonial authors who have striven to carve out a place for themselves in third world homes while paradoxically endorsing the viewpoint that the state of homelessness, of being in a cultural void, is a source of enlightenment. That a typical postmodern author collects a cultural ragbag of sorts which he curiously gathered during his journey into different countries is at the root of an assumption which portrays the struggle of Bangladesh refugees to find a permanent abode only to prove the nullity and vacuity of the whole exercise. The hidden motif of 'home' negotiates its way through numerous treacherous experiences only to give itself in finally to authorial

It is interesting to see how the author has made way for those who prefer hinterlands and bohemias of their own instead of falling into the trappings of settled fixities. A networked study of some of the major characters in the fiction would make the point. While attempting to do so I have of course assumed that the reader is familiar with the text and the characters.

Though Kanai lives in a translated world, a world at once unreal and vacuous, he is not at ease while journeying through the socio-cultural hinterlands. Kanai's fall, in a literal sense, indicates nature's way of rejecting those who rush into its fold without understanding its law, which is one of perpetual change and transformation. Kanai's return to the world where he came from, is indirectly a comment on those who cannot live life beyond the confines of a routine, that is spun like a paralyzing web within the cozy spaces of habitats, called 'home'. A fine distinction between the statements made by Piya and Nilima—'home is where the Orcellas are' 'home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea' outlines a hidden presence that divides two sets of characters sheltering opposing concepts of 'home' and 'homelessness'. On one hand there are characters, who see home as a site of conflict, on the other there are those, who see it as a metaphor for unity and harmony, a single unifying principle that reconciles and binds the opposing elements. The characters, who live their lives around the conflicting poles of home and homelessness, are Nilma and Nirmal. Nilima is enterprising and she can do anything to secure the space, to which she belongs, space by which she lives her dreams and innate desires, lending them her vivid presence. She is entirely rooted in her socio-cultural milieu, which she has only partly created and yet which she owns wholly by encompassing a section of humanity within it. She is disappointed with Nirmal, who wears unsettlement as a kind of lifestyle apparel, flapping along, away from the specificities of one's existence into a state of reckless fluidity where one may attach oneself to any or all destinations considered serious and worth fighting for A selfless state, a state where one experiences a unique fusion with the world's problems is one to which Nirmal graduates. On the contrary Nilman of cannot emerge out of her state of fixity, her self-created universe of Lusibari. Transcendence of any kind for her is an act of transgression, for every place has its law. Nirmal, by this law is a violator, an intruder into that circle into that single uninformed existence that Nilima at once substantiates and celebrates, through her dedication to her reinvented space. Nilima is the history of T is the history of Lusibari created in an imagined space, Nirmal is the poetry of the world as written by Rilke and as secure as a copy book in a revolutionary of the world as written by Rilke and as secure as a copy book in a revolutionary shoulder bag. It is interesting to see Nilima as history

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appearing at the homing point of all destinies while the irony lies in the fact that she, as the imagined history of all at Lusibari, fails to chain the characters to the locale in which she is deeply entrenched. Nirmal chases a romantic ideal across the margin of history with Rilke for company which finally collapses in the illusory space between what the Bangladeshi refugees claim as home and what renders them 'homeless'. He inhabits the illusory space that challenges the notion of home as a hospitable domain and yet home is where the revolutionaries are, and that space could be anywhere in the world.

Now about Fokir and Moyna. Though transcendence is Moyna's objective, her preparation for it starts at home; home is where she has learnt to overcome the imponderables erected by destiny. A yardstick measures her achievements, which is entirely local. In the local universe of Lusibari Moyna and Nilima are the pathfinders, incarnating the subtlest and surest ways to achieve success. Home for them is sacrosanct, for it is here that preparation to meet the challenges of life begins. Fokir by this token is a violator of the harmony that home stands for. He experiences complete union with the river, which respects no boundaries or culture, washing ashore myriad possibilities only to dissolve them in its abysmal depth. River is a passion for Fokir, who identifies each and every moment of its life with his own, the placid moments and also the deeply ferocious ones that lie within. Lusibari, for Fokir is a prison where he broods and sulks. He is the counterpoint of Moyna, whose ambition to rise above her surrounding is only a brief episode in Fokir's drama of escape. It is this desire for escape that brings Fokir close to Piya, the river-woman looking for strange creatures from water. Piya is an American, separated from Fokir by an unbridgeable chasm, but then it is only Fokir who symbolically manages to sail through it. Moyna's love for her home is her greatest strength, she exploits the possibilities available there, whereas Fokir's love for life across the frontiers, towards which the river flows is what sustains him.

Now about Kanai and Piya. Kanai inhabits a lingo-centric world. Language is his power, a weapon he wields while making conquests. Home for him, as he rightly says, is the translated world, a world where language acts as an instrument to dilute the objective reality. His failure is the failure of language and he realizes it the moment he faces the reality outside. Piya on the other hand spends little time in romancing with words and as a shifting domain, a place that can be created anywhere in the world. Her final statement that home for her is where Orcellas are is a trifle arty and Ghosh's brilliant juxtapositions, so assiduously worked out

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until then, fail to rescue him from the burden of that banal expression. In fact he overworks the idea of home at the wrong end of the novel only to show that there is that fatal chink in his multicultural armout His Indian 'middle class snobbery' is hopelessly passe and his authorial signature irredeemably contrived. Between the Orcella and the tea-cup he loses his initial verve and settles for an easy way out by dispatching Kanai back to his job, by allowing Nilima the last word. The last word fails to raise a tempest in any one's half-sipped tea-cup. The end of the endless novel loses its characters to their individual spaces and the promising beginnings wither out one by one until the very last. The idea of home in the river-country is nothing short of the gift of the river. The idea of "homelessness' too can be traced back to the river. After all, what does the hungry tide do but devour homes, leaving the residual silt of its wrath as the fecund origin for new homes. Ghosh fails to measure up to the huge canvas he selects. Filling that huge canvas with collages undermines his art as much as it fails to arouse the sleepy story line

It would be interesting to see how the diametrically opposite concepts of 'home' and homelessness, pass into each other and how the characters while appearing to incarnate these opposing concepts have done service to neither. The idea of home is sustained, both through fixity and ceaseless negotiations in space. A specific location can be called 'home' as long as one lives there. But when that location is made to cast its shadow on its inhabitants, dogging their steps and compelling them to return to its fold, it becomes a tyranny endorsed by those who see locations as inalienable and integrated wholes of their consciousness from which escape proves both treacherous and futile. The novelist's only intention in presenting home and homelessness as opposing concepts is to finally show them as one and he does this by reworking on the binary and eventually erasing the boundary that divides the two. The possibility of return is denied in the text. Return, if any, as it has been portrayed in the text is not a return into origins or specified locations. It is a return that carries with it tools that further contaminates the imagined purity of specified locations, the tools are so powerful that they crudely violate the ideologies of a particular location that shaped one's identity. The novel, sadly, loses its bearing at this high point, a contestable highpoint without its high priest!

It is the consciousness of homelessness that destroys Nirmal. Nirmals revolutionary ideals are directed towards securing a place for Bangladeshi refugees picking refugees, picking up along the way a few lessons in fluidity and leaving the undone was a few lessons in the und the undone work to Rilke in a rigid-frame of ill-fitting poetry. The

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dichotomy between home and homelessness rips him apart as he decides dichotomy a path that his ideals have not paved for him. Removing to walk the specificities of his location, his ideals expose a duality that him find to understand. His commitment towards the cause of Bangladeshi refugees is at best a romantic ardour that displays both his inability to understand this duality that propels him towards a fight for a permanent space, while making him forsake the comfort of fixed locations. It is the trappings of age-old thinking, the consciousness of home as a fixed destination and the consciousness of homelessness as a state of degeneration that make him take up cudgels for the refugees, sidelining the disclosure that his ideals secretly harbour a creative exposure that home is the seat of homelessness. Good poetry, but bad fiction. Even his fiery notebook cannot save Nirmal from a faceless end.

Nilima's and Moyna's consciousness of home are the most entrenched in the test. To move across specific location for Nilima would mean a sort of betrayal of the bond she has built with it after years of dedication towards the social progress of the community, which lives there. Things are however different in the case of Moyna. She doesn't experience the kind of attachment that Nilima experiences for her location, which in her case acts as a confinement, tying her down to the mundane chores, which she would like to abandon in her search for a better future, which may hold for her the promise of a release from the life of confinement. Both Nilima and Moyna have a heightened awareness of their surrounding, of the place that would shape their destinies. While Moyna's immobility has to be seen in the context of the unique relationship she forms with the place, Moyna's entrenchment has to be explained in terms of lack of opportunities and scope, which she might have gained had she attempted to form an alliance with Kanai. Lusibari is home for Nilima and Moyna, because both of them have chosen to stay there. Mad they moved to other places, they would have formed new linkages with space and time that would have undermined their initial anchorage. Home for Nilima means commitment, not the contours of a geographical location whereas for Moyna it means deprivation. Moving, for both of them, to a new place would not mean homelessness; it would rather be a gesture towards finding a new space for sheltering their desires. Home in other words is an unending quest, Nilima at the beginning of the end, and for Moyna of the end of the beginning.

Kanai, as he claims, lives in a translated world, a world to which he returns, when his love for Piya goes unreciprocated. A return to home for him means unreciprocated love and pursuit of new desires. If one

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views his life in Lusibari, one would be compelled to say that it had become home for him by virtue of his living there, gathering manifold experiences into the coherence of realization. But such realization is not a local product; it could show up anywhere. And eventually one has a local product, it could be to agree that wisdom-gaining exercise happens mostly outside the spatial to agree that wisdom games that is why the contrivance of the long river-journey in open space. Fokir's and Piya's cases are of course too obvious to discuss. They see their river-journey together as a metaphor for a home that never was, that never would be. Piya chases dolphins, who carry her always across fixed boundaries and Fokir remains trapped in the river, caught between its ebb and tide.

Ghosh in The Hungry Tide flips the theoretical underpinnings of the postmodern debate. His purpose is not merely to deconstruct the binary that holds home and homelessness as counterpoints, but to unite them as parts of an integrated whole. In deconstruction, elements rarely add up into a united, comprehensive whole. Rather, an artistic creation exposed to deconstructive strategy stands as a house divided against itself. Ghosh works by a method that can be called deconstructive, but then his ostensible objective is to create an independent discourse, where terms such as home and homelessness can have meaning only when they are seen as containing each other, not as independent entities, locked in an eternal battle to gain access into recent discursive fields. Home is where one lives and this can be anywhere in the world. Homelessness by this token is a state of enlightenment, containing all the suppressed desires of home, a route into dialectics that feeds on a realization that it is necessary for one to have a home first, in order to lose it. The ephemeral home of the river dolphins stands as the perpetual backdrop against which The Hungry Tide writes its mythical story.

At the end of it all, The Hungry Tide swallows up both home' and 'homelessness' along with their multiple inhabitants, and what remains like silt under the raging water is Bonbibi's kingdom of entropy without a trace of the authorial injunction written with a finger of water on the vast body of the river. The Bangla original which is in Ghosh's mind would perhaps have made the discourse, which Ghosh has got unmade in English. Nirmal, Nilima, Fokir, Piya, Moyna, even Lusibari, Bonderi and the river would have got their tongues of fire in Bangla. The grand human discourse, which, Ghosh thinks his authorial splashes of water on the English canvas has created, is a non-starter. It remains buried in Bengali life-experience and Bangla folklore much like the mighty Sundarbans that remains buried in its ebbs and tides. Human discourses, when they lose their tongues of fire, languish as watery metaphors in translation

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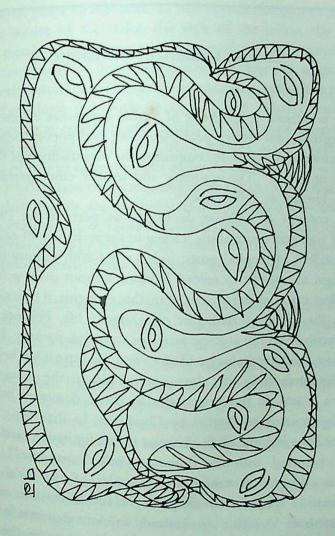
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and die in the hands of the very author who served a translation as and die in served a translation as original. Loss of discourses, their systematic decimation and eventual original. Los destruction in English fictions in India was never more poignant as in destruction Tide. If the non-Indian English reader finds Ghosh's fare The Hungs hence laudable, then it is not a credit to the novelist, it is a credit to the river-fog that separates the banks.



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"It Happened To a Friend of a Friend": Urban Legends in Contemporary Mizo Society

Cherrie Lalnunziri Chhangte

Folklore is defined as 'the body of verbal expressive culture, including tales, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, and popular beliefs current among a particular population, comprising the oral tradition of that culture, subculture, or group.' The academic and usually ethnographic study of folklore is known as folkloristics.

The concept of folklore developed as part of the 19th century ideology of romantic nationalism, leading to the reshaping of oral traditions to serve modern ideological goals; only in the 20th century did ethnographers begin to attempt to record folklore without overt political goals While folklore can contain religious or mythic elements, it typically concerns itself with the mundane traditions of everyday life. Folklore frequently ties the practical and the esoteric into one narrative package. It has often been conflated with mythology, and vice versa, because it has been assumed that any figurative story that does not pertain to the dominant beliefs of the time is not of the same status as those dominant beliefs. Thus, Roman religion is called "myth" by Christians. In that way, "both myth and folklore have become catch-all terms for all figurative narratives which do not correspond with the dominant belief structure." Sometimes "folklore" is religious in nature, like the tales of the Welsh Mabington or those found in Icelandic skaldic poetry. Many of the tales in the Golden Legend of Jacob de Voragine also embody folklore elements in a Christian context: examples of such Christian mythology are the themes word round Saint George or Saint Christopher. In this case, the term of Odin the is being used in a pejorative sense. That is, while the tales of Odin the

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Wanderer have a religious value to the Norse who composed the stories, because it does not fit into a Christian configuration it is not considered because "religious" by Christians who may instead refer to it as "folklore."

On the other hand, folklore can be used to accurately describe

On the other hand, tolkiote can be used to accurately describe a figurative narrative, which has no sacred or religious content. In the Jungian view, which is but one method of analysis, it may instead pertain to unconscious psychological patterns, instincts or archetypes of the mind. This lore may or may not have components of the fantastic (such as magic, ethereal beings or the personification of inanimate objects). These folktales may or may not emerge from a religious tradition, but nevertheless speak to deep psychological issues. There can be both a moral and psychological scope to the work, as well as entertainment value, depending upon the nature of the teller, the style of the telling, the ages of the audience members, and the overall context of the performance. Folklorists generally resist universal interpretations of narratives and, wherever possible, analyze oral versions of tellings in specific contexts, rather than print sources, which often show the work or bias of the writer or editor.

A common contemporary folklore is the urban legend, which this paper will primarily focus on. Urban legends are a "kind of folklore consisting of stories often thought to be factual by those circulating them. The term is often used with a meaning similar to the expression "apocryphal story." Urban legends are not necessarily untrue, but they are often false, distorted, exaggerated, or sensationalized. Despite the name, urban legends do not necessarily take place in an urban setting. The name is designed to differentiate them from traditional folklore created in preindustrial times."

Urban legends are sometimes repeated in news stories and, in recent years, distributed by e-mail. People frequently say such tales happened to a "friend of a friend"—so often, in fact, that "friend of a friend", or "FOAF", has become a commonly used term for this sort of story. In the UK, urban legends are sometimes referred to as WTSes (Whale Tumour Stories), from a famous World War II story about whale meat. Similarly, but this time based on a story about monkey meat, the Dutch came to their name for urban legends—they call them "broodjeaapverhalen" (i.e. monkey sandwich stories).

Some urban legends have survived a very long time, evolving only slightly over the years, as in the case of the story of a woman killed by spiders nesting in her elaborate hairdo. Others are new and reflect modern circumstances, like the story of people being anaesthetized and waking up minus a kidney surgically removed for transplant. Urban legends often are "born of fears and insecurities, or specifically designed to prey

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on such concerns." It is significant that fears and insecurities often play a large part in the formulation of urban legends. In this sense they reflect the anxieties and preoccupations of the society in which they prevail thus serving as cultural mirrors of the times.

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Jan Harold Brunvand, professor emeritus of English at the University of Utah in the United States, used the term in print as early as 1979 (in a book review appearing in the Journal of American Folklore 92:362), However, even at that time folklorists and others had been writing about "urban legends" for a good while. Brunvand used his collection of legends. The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends & Their Meanings to make two points: first, that legends, myths, and folklore do not belong solely to so-called primitive or traditional societies; and second, that one could learn much about urban and modern culture by studying such legends; Brunvand has since published a series of similar books. The field also credits Brunvand as the first to use the term vector (after the concept of a biological vector) to describe a person or entity passing along an urban legend. Orality obviously plays an important role in the spreading of these legends since most of these are passed on by word-of-mouth.

Structure

Most urban legends are framed as stories, with plots and characters The urban legends resemble a proper joke, especially in the manner of transmission, only that they are much darker in tone and theme.

The compelling nature of the story and its elements of mysters, horror, fear, or humor are part of what makes the tales so attractive. Many of these legends are presented as warnings or cautionary tales. Other urban legends might better be called "widely dispersed misinformation," such as the erroneous belief that you will automatically pass all of your college courses in a semester if your roommate kills himself. While such "facts" may not have the narrative elements of traditional legend, they are passed from person to person and generally have the elements of horror, humor or caution found in legends. Urban legends also concern unexplained phenomena, like phantom apparitions.

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The Mizo Context

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In contemporary times, the Mizos, generally speaking, are not very In contemps, largely as a result of the influence of Christianity, which superstandar, which has done away with many of the beliefs that existed in the pre-Christian has done the pre-Christian the However, like any other community, the Mizo community is also era. However of urban legends, although the extent of the impact that such legends have on the people may vary according to the environment, educational background, and social and economic standing of the listener. Examples of such beliefs still persistent today in rural as well as urban settings are, the belief that an accident may befall members of a family if they embark on a journey in opposite directions (like north and south) on the same day from the same house; that it is bad luck to have a wedding in the months of July and August (which is strictly observed to this day), and so on. Another legend is that of the cat with horns that resides in Phawngpui mountain; it is purpotedly fatal to lay mortal eyes on the creature, but nobody has seen it yet! Urban legends that emerged in Mizo society some time after the First World War are of a lighter vein. Mizo men numbering approximately 2000, were recruited in the French army as part of the Allied Forces to help fight the Germans. They were known as the Lushai Labour Company Nos. 26,27,28,29, and they were mainly employed in menial jobs as cooks, cleaners and coolies.5 However, upon their return, these men gave glowing reports of their heroism against the Germans in the battlefield, and were hailed as heroes by the community, who swallowed everything they said. Later on, of course, it was common knowledge that most of these 'heroes' never even went near the battlefield, let alone perform heroic exploits agaisnt the Germans. Yet, with the full knowledge that these tales were fabricated, their stories continue to be passed on. Songs were composed in the traditional tune commemorating their exploits, and to this day some of these songs are sung even in urban areas whenever there is a festival or a celebration involving the community. Here is a verse from one such song, entitled German Ral Run (The Storming of the German Troops);

> Sikimanding Sap i lungmawl e, i lungmawl e, German Rallian tawnin tir suh ka lungdi, chheih Ka suihlung leng tur hi dawn ve la.

(Second Commanding Officer, you are thoughtless, O so thoughtless,

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri Do not send my Beloved to face the huge German troops, Think of the loneliness I will have to endure).

The last verse is sung by the hero:

Ka Di tap ruaiin mi ring lo la, mi ring lo la, German rallian kulhpui kan han tawn ni chuan e A surin ngen mu a sur sung sung.

(Do not think I cried tears of terror, My Love, The day we stormed the German fortress, Bullets hailed like rain from the skies).

Folklores often tellingly portray the social ethos and preoccupations of a people. The Mizo's love of humour and witty repertoire is seen in the lore that is prevalent in the society. A legendary character that emerged based on World War II tales is that of Rumliana, a non-existent hero who also went to join the French forces; his trademark wit, sarcasm, cunning, physical strength and bravery make him a much beloved and oft-quoted character even in contemporary times. This fictional hero's exploits are told in the form of humorous anecdotes, and tales of his exploits are repeated and exaggerated at every telling. He was supposed to have resisted a dental check-up as part of the physical fitness evaluation prior to his enlistment in the army; he insisted that he would not be fighting the German army with his teeth, and his superiors were at a loss to refute this mixture of stubborn tribal wisdom and cunning. He was supposedly so persuasive and good with words that he was able to procure an extension of his short leave from the Army by stating that the floods prevented his return—and this was at the peak of summer, when there was a drought. Another tale relates of an incident where he was given the task of constructing a house by the British officers Towards the end, when construction was nearly complete and the officer was inspecting the interior of the house, Rumliana, who was standing upon the roof, started urinating from the top right at the place where his superiors were standing. Needless to say, the officer and his retinue were livid with rage, but Rumliana, in all innocence, blithely protested that this was the Mizo's traditional way of testing whether a new roof would leak or not, leaving the Britishman helpless to do anything by way of remonstration since he did not want to offend local sensibilities.

What characterises Rumliana as an urban legend is that, although he never really did exist, he *could* have been a 'friend of a friend', believable

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and made seemingly authentic by his possession of typical Mizo traits; and made it is probable that his tales are actually based on real characters moreover, to all the control only that, he used his wit and cunning in such a way and incidents. Not only that, he used his wit and cunning in such a way and included the authority of the British without overtly showing disrespect. Beneath the servility and awe that the white man expected and did get, Beneaus others, protested to such subjugation in his own subtle way. Perhaps this, and the ability of the Mizo psyche to identify with his sentiments, accounts for his popularity. Similarly, another urban legend that has this kind of believability is the lore of Tualte vanglai ('the heydays of Tualte', Tualte being a village in Mizoram). Although the village of Tualte actually exists, none of the accounts of the fame, greatness and notoriety that it supposedly possessed in its heydays, are historically true. Yet, to this day, when anyone wants to give a highly exaggerated or unbelievable story or joke with a twist of authenticity, he refers to it as happening in the days of Tualte, though none of what he says is taken seriously. For instance, the joke goes that gooseberry trees in the heydays of Tualte were so fruitful that the neighbouring Mango tree would produce gooseberries too. And from there evolved the adage, Nothing but 200seberries come from gosseberry trees', a saying commonly repeated to this day. An interesting belief concerns the nuthlawi (pronounced 'nuthloi'). The nuthlawi is defined as a woman who is either divorced, and/or is an unmarried or a single mother. The status of such a woman is, perhaps not surprisingly, very low in the society, and her position is associated with shame and stigmatization, a common occurrence in other tribal and non-tribal societies of India. What marks the attitude of the Mizos towards this woman as different is the various myths that are associated with her status. A nuthlawi, for instance, is almost equated with the siren/seductress figure which is found so frequently in literature produced by men. She is seen as someone who can deviously manouver her way into various situations and manipulate other people, especially males, by using her seductive charms. She is seen especially as someone who takes advantage of the gullibility and sexual weaknesses of men in order to get her way. She is portrayed as a flamboyant character without many scruples, sexual or otherwise, tougher and more hard-bitten than other women, and much of her success in any field is attributed to her 'lack of shame' more than anything else. In other words, she is believed to be someone who lacks morality and principles; at the same time, perhaps due to this percieved lack of morality, she is also one of the few women who have the courage to fall. to follow the desires of the heart, since she does not have anything else to lose, having lost her reputation anyway.

In other words, she becomes a larger-than-life figure, a legend,

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albiet in a very negative sense. She is seen as someone who can do things albiet in a very negative considered to do; someone who can beguite that a 'normal' woman would be unable to do; someone who can beguite enchant and dupe even men who are normally considered practical and level-headed. She is a figure of fascination, the one who simultaneously attracts and repels, representing danger, taboo, and temptation. She is the one who tends to get blamed if anything goes wrong within the social structure that she lives in. Paradoxically, at an individual level, she may receive sympathy because the *nuthlawi* is very often a close relative or friend, or at the very least, a friend of a friend, in such a closeknit tribal society as the Mizo's.

Ironically, with the impact of modernization, there is a significant leap in the divorce rates and families are breaking up in alarmingly large numbers especially in urban areas. An increase in broken families automatically translates into an increase in the number of such women, and the prevalent attitude towards such women is highly detrimental to their psychological, and emotional wellbeing as a result of the mythologizing tendencies of the society, which blows up the nuthlaw?s character out of proportion.

Urban legends, thus, may have extremely far-reaching effects since such attitudes may hamper the balanced judgement of a society; a woman is instantly transformed into a different person as percieved by the society, attaining almost mythical proportions alien to attributes possessed by 'normal' persons. It may be of considerable interest to the sociologist and the psychologist to delve into the reasons why such a character is seen as a threat to the society, arousing emotions of fear and insecurity, the two basic ingredients that tend to give birth to urban legends. One may wonder if there is a close link between the fear and insecurity engendered by such a woman with the increasing influence of feminist thought in a formerly conservative society that has always functioned on patriarchal lines. Women in tribal societies are no longer as dependent upon the males in the society, especially when there are no rigid class or caste distinctions (as is the case in most North Eastern tribal societies), and many women have evolved into strong, independent individuals living life by their own rules. This new-found independence is perhaps more strongly asserted or emphasized in the divorcee, who neccesarily has to fend for herself in order to survive, since she no longer has a male partner to share the burden with. Whereas the male has traditionally been the head of the the head of the house and the decision-maker in the family, bearing the brunt of the family's burdens on his shoulder, of late, the situation is such that his arrangements such that his support or presence is no longer as vital to the woman's well-being. This rewell-being. This may thus, give rise to a feeling of insecurity and resentment

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in the male. The question that arises then, is, have these myths regarding the divorcee or unwed mother been perpetuated by the men in the the divorced And are women themselves, still largely under patriarchal influence, conditioned to view themselves as such? These and other questions cannot be easily answered and may be a subject for another paper.

The widespread illegal immigration of Myanmarese citizens into Mizoram across the Champhai border has resulted in an influx of foriegners in the State. These immigrants usually seek employment in the domestic circles of the urban areas like Aizawl, Lunglei, Kolasib, Serchhip, etc. Most of the household help, as well as many taxi drivers, are people from these areas. This, in turn, has given rise to a number of new lores, again, arising from a mixture of fear, suspicion and insecurity, the added ingredient being that these tales are believable because there is a high probability that they may contain some truth. Such tales include the belief that housemaids give cough syrup and other relaxants to the infants they babysit in order not to be disturbed by them; that all of these workers are potential thieves waiting to gain the trust of their employers before robbing them blind; that there is a network between the women who double as sex workers, and taxi drivers, who act as their pimps; and that there are often severed body parts (like fingers) in the canned food imported from Myanmar, and so on.

Although a majority of traditional beliefs and sayings are no longer in use in contemporary urban settings, some have survived. A man whose wife is pregnant still baulks at the thought of killing any animal, domestic or otherwise, lest something undesirable (usually a physical deformity) happens to the unborn child. Folklore is often didactic in nature, and such sayings as 'it is never too late to have the misfortune of aquiring a physical deformity' is a saying that has been and continues to be passed on, perhaps originally an attempt to discourage people who mock those who are physically challenged. Other sayings are of a demeaning nature to women, like 'women and crabs do not have any religion', 'dogs and women give their affection to whoever lavishes attention on them', 'fences and women are replaceable', and so on. Although these sayings are not teally vocalised nowadays, it is a different question altogether as to whether such an attitude towards women is still prevalent. Other sayings concern characteristics that some of the sub-tribes/clans have. For instance, the Raltes are traditionally described as an extremely noisy group, Pachuau and Sailo as stubborn, Chhangte men are considered henpecked, and 50 On. Again, these sayings, although not attributed as having too much truth in them, are still very prevalent.

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The erroneous belief that Mizos have emerged from a big took The erroneous benefit called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times in the called 'Chhinlung' in olden times is a lore that has influenced and impacted called 'Chhinlung' in olden times in the called 'Chhinlung' in many of our folktales. Although such a belief is considered to be false and without basis, Mizos, as a figure of speech, still often describe and without basis, Island, themselves as 'Chhinlung Chhuak' or, 'emerging from Chhinlung'. The belief that no celebration is complete without the traditional drum (khuan) is one that continues to have an impact in modern times. Despite the modernization of the Church vis a vis the musical instruments used in worship, no church is complete without the presence of the drum. It is interesting to note that spirituality and church revivals are intensely linked with the drumbeats in the Mizo church. Any church revival worth its salt is never without dancing, which is accompanied by the rhythmic and almost ritualistic beats of the drum. Here, one may venture to draw a comparison with the role of drums in African tribal communities, where drums played such a major role that they continued to be used to relat information during slave uprisings. This, in fact, resulted in the banning of drums in America during the 1700s and 1800s.6 Similar to the African context, the khuang (drum) plays an important role in the Mizo society acting as a transmitter of the cultural and religious experiences of the people.

In conclusion, one may say that despite the changing paradigms that tribal societies have undergone as a result of modernization, westernization, and urbanization, tribal societies like the Mizos still do retain elements of folklore and folk culture in their everday beliefs. Christianing has had a huge impact on the society, bringing with it literacy, education and development in various areas, and significantly minimising the influence of traditional belief systems. Much of the beliefs and practices of old are viewed with a certain amount of scepticism by the younger generation, especially with the increasing exposure to western ways via the media explosion. Yet, such a society in transition is unique in that the old and new belief systems are able to exist side by side. In this age of widespread literacy, rapid mass communication and travel, it is only natural that new legends will evolve and become popular. Chain letters, anonymous emails and endless SMS jokes are passed on and in a short span of time. new lores are easily born. Traditionally steeped in myths, legends and folktales it is a loss of the state of folktales, it is perhaps not surprising that, along with the old beliefs, new learners and lors legends continue to develop in contemporary times, legends and lors that are unique. that are unique to the urban lifestyle, enriching the corpus of existing lores and bringing lores and bringing a fresh insight into the evolution of the modern roll society.

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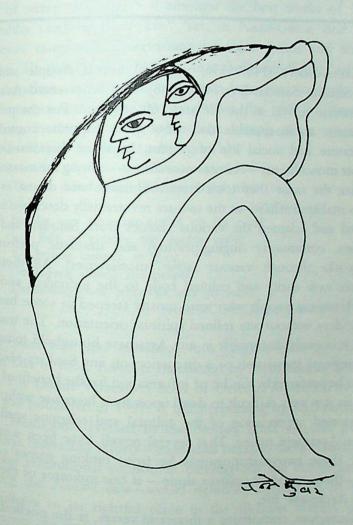
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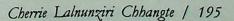
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Brunvand, Jan Harold. The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends And Their Meanings. (New York: Norton, 2003). p.2.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Divine Verses by Saroj Kumar Dutta, Vision Publications, Tinsukia (Assam) 1997, Pp. 179+vi, Rs.200/-

Naamghosa Hymns To The Blessed Lord by Pranabananda Pathak, Promila & Co Publishers in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi 2005, Pp.243, Rs.495/-

Cri Madhavadeva (1489-1596) was the dearest disciple and associate Of Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568) who represented Assam in the neo-Vaisnavic revival in the 15th and 16th centuries. For the posterity, the two became an inseparable duo who made supreme contributions to the literature and social life of Assam. In short their mission was to propagate monotheism—eksarana naamdharma—among the masses in Assam. To realize the same they took literature, music and drama as the took The two mahapurushas—as the two are reverentially described in Assam translated and adapted the various classics from Sanskrit and organized recitations, community singing(praying) and dramatic performances of those works through various sattras (monasteries). All these gave an altogether new entity and cultural code to the individual and social life of the Assamese people who were mostly steeped in some base practices in those days without any refined spiritual orientation. The tradition lived on and it is easily discernible in any Assamese household today. A review of Naamghosa's translation or a discussion on any Sankara-Madhava topic needs to be prefaced by this bit of information for the benefit of uninitiated readers as it is very difficult to dwell upon their literature without a careful and reasoned appreciation of the cultural and religious spell they have over the Assamese milieu. That several novels have been written on the lives of these two mahapurushas by front ranking names of assamest fiction—three on Madhavadeva alone— is one indicator of their influence on the Assamese life.

Naamghosa, comprising a thousand verses, is the poetical expression of Madhavadeva's spiritual quest. Of the thousand verses, a few hundred (four hundred, according to Maheswar Neog and six hundred, according to Satyendranath Sharma) are translations from various Puranas, the rest

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are his own. The Assamese Vaisnavic literature was largely guided by are his on a pronounced in Shankaradeva's advice to Madhavadeva a principle to retain the original tone". Maheswar Neog observes that this allegiance at times created an obstruction in expressing the self. But this and that in Naam-Ghosa, Madhavadeva overcomes that hindrance. Banikanta Kakoti, a giant of twentieth century Assamese language and literature, refers to this work as confluence of three tempers that flows to the sea of sacred joy— a respectful glorification of the path shown by Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva's surrender to the Almighty and the greatness of Krshna Bhakti. To quote Banikanta Kakoti "This soulful Bhakti oozing off his (Madhavadeva) heart raises Naam-Ghosa from being another didactic anthology of verses and places it amongst the best works of literature with a healthy celebration of life." Yes, in Naam-Ghosa, one discerns Madhavadeva's categorical observations on some trends and tendencies of his times. He powerfully advocates that the 'naamdharma' as defined by Sri Sankaradeva, reaches out to people from various walks of life. He also dismises with unambiguous disdain the trick of those, who,

> The so called guru does not know what the scriptures say, but he says whatever comes on his mind and fails to remove the doubts withal. Yet styling himself as guru He moves among the people Demanding their reverence and services.

without going to the depth of spiritualism, simply treats religion as a

means of livelihood feigning to be 'guru's.

(verse-55, The Divine Verses)

The Naam-Ghosa was first translated into English (also to Hindi) by Haramohan Das in 1955. Another translation by Soroj Kumar Dutta with the title — The Divine Verses—A book of Oriental Mysticism in Popular ldiom' was published in 1997. A third rendering by Sri Pranabananda Pathak — Naamghosa-Hymns to the Blessed Lord' — was published in 2005. These individual efforts—individual because these translators did of translational support in carrying out the challenging work of translating the Naam-Ghosa—would definitely contribute in bringing Sankara-Madhava to its rightful place in the all-India literary dialogue. And that entails the translators huge responsibility. After all in translating Work like Naam Ghosa, one has to be careful about its religious significance and the tone of the diction used by the original poet. Soroj

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hundred according s, the rest Kumar Dutta and the persons behind the publication (the book was published posthumously) of his 'Divine Verses' appeared to be aware about the challenge. A concise but very appropriate introduction by eminent scholar Mukunda Madhava Sharma and a kind foreword by the then President Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma adds to the library value of the book. Readers uninitiated to the Vaisnavic literature would be helped by the glossary at the end. Coming a decade later, Pathak's translation was supposed to be a more wholesome effort. However, it appears that he was led more by enthusiasm than the home work necessary in carrying out such a work. And this is admitted in his introduction in all innocence.

Prof Dutta takes care to maintain the dignified tone in choice of vocabulary in a fairly unpretentious way. This reviewer met him almost daily in the late eighties of the last century as colleagues in the same college when he started this work and therefore is aware about the care, caution and labour behind it. Let us take just one example.

> Having gained the rare human frame, Lay aside your desire for worldliness Befitting the brute. And instead, sitting in the company of the virtuous And singing the glories of Hari, Drink that nectar with contentment,

(verse 27, The Divine Verses) (Madhavadeva's source-Bhagavad Purana-11.9.29)

The language obviously does not adequately indicate the matchless poetry of Madhavadeva. But at least the readers can make an idea of the philosophy and the masterful efforts of the two mahapurushas in propagating the same that has become the sustaining spirit of the moral fabric and aesthetic entity of the Assamese society for over five centuries. Now compare that with the version of Pathak-

> O unique human life, Abandon the life of a material nature. Sing the Lord's praise with hymns, Sweeter than milk and honey, With all noble company.

Such a diction is unlikely to 'make the present English educated young generation of Assam in particular and also the people living in the rest of the country aware of the essence of devotion towards God given to us by Madhared to us by Madhavadeva that Pathak expects in the preface in all humility

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We also see that Dutta is not using capitals in starting every line. He We also starting every line. He was not making a poetical rendering in English. Besides, he has not translated the headings of different cantos. Probably he was be has two factors. First, for a modern readership, those are not guideu sy and secondly, their rendering in English would appear too literal. It is ironic that Pathak's attempt to do so proved the second apprehension correct. After all picture for chabi, 'advice' for upadesha and 'determination of God' for Ishwar nirnoy are never the acceptable words in a book like Naam-Ghosa.

At times Pathak's translation deviates from the original meaning. Take the following for example

> Thy name is the essence of all scriptures O Lord, Thy name Rama, Krsna, Hari is the supreme religion. He whose tongue never forsakes the Lord's name, Attains salvation with all ease. Therefore wait not to attain salvation, Attain the same by singing this name (verse-23)

Readers who read the original would agree that Dutta gets the meaning much nearer to the source-

> The name of Rama Krisna Hari is the highest religion being the essence of all the Vedic thoughts. Verily, there is no religion beyond it. Then, without recollecting that name by what other means are you going to cross the world.

In certain verses however, the difference between the two translations is insignificant. For example—

> O Supreme Lord Thou art possessor of the world, Thou art the saviour of the fallen Verily, thou art beginningless and endless (verse-787, Dutta)

And,

O Lord of the Universe, Thou art the destiny of the sinner. O Lord, Thou art the saviour of the sinner; Thou art the supreme personality of the Godhead;

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri Thou art beginningless, endless, (verse 787, Pathak)

True, translation, especially literary translation, is a tricky exercise with the risk of being 'too literal' on the one hand and being 'infidel' on the other. Readers would take the minor deviations as a gift of translation if the language is eminently readable. Otherwise a sincere adherence to the original text's meaning would earn their appreciation. But if a work does not satisfy either way, then the purpose fails. Dutta chose the second option and thus his work is expected to serve a library purpose to some extent.

The academia in Assam is yet to arrive at a consensus regarding English spelling of Assamese words. And that is noticeable in these two works. Pathak's 'Krsna' is Dutta's 'Krisna'. And though both of them wrote 'Naamghosa', /sa/ for the last phoneme is not beyond question.

In spite of comparative inadequacies, these efforts should provoke the academia to organize the Sankara-Madhava studies in a more productive and methodical manner and arrange for more wholesome and purposeful translation of their works. It is a task long overdue. Let us not forget what Madhavadeva said in his Naamghosa-

> The debased find faults alone/ and the moderates scan both vice and virtues and the lofty discover virtues in everything, while the excellent enlarge even the least of virtues. (verse 120, The Divine Verses)

> > Amrit Jyoti Mahanta

And Where, My Friend, Lay You Hiding by Ananda Mukerji, Harper Collins, 2006, Pp.263, Rs.295/-

Eminently and even compulsively readable, Ananda Mukerji's book seeks to explore the fountainhead of human creativity. Obsessed with his art a writer abandons his wife, his children, his circle of devoted friends, and disappears in and disappears into a Bombay slum, in the underprivileged environs of which he draws in the draws in the draws in the underprivileged environs of works which he draws inspiration for a new crop of highly acclaimed works.

This sort of average a This sort of extreme devotion to one's creative instinct is an intriguing

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premise, one that most of us might consider implausible and to a certain premise, one premise, one premise, one and to a certain extent destructive. But if art is indeed the outcome of an extremely selfish extent desarrange effort, then it is easy to grasp, why the artist has to take and personnel and personnel through varied experiences, all in hope that palls his new avatar will take his creativity to a new high.

The novel begins with a train journey, during which there is a chance encounter between the Shanjoy and Anjani Prasad. As individuals both of them could not be more different; Shanjoy is the English-speaking of a well-to-do-Bengali family, whereas Anjani is a small town dweller with rustic manners honed out of a very traditional upbringing. After their first meeting, it does not take much time for them to discover that they share a common love for books and writing. An easy friendship develops between them and they interact frequently and try to best each other's writing efforts. Between the two friends it is Shanjoy, who is more judgemental, he never fails to criticize his friend whenever an opportunity presents itself.

In fact the first sentence, with which the book begins, "He was a man of easy fidelity," constitutes the first in a series of judgements that Shanjoy would pass on Anjani. There is a degree of jealousy in Shanjoy's attitude, for he is constantly plagued by the notion that he might not be as good a writer as Anjani is. Anjani has no such fears. He is so obsessed with the stories he is writing that he does not care about how he compares to Shanjoy or anyone else. Anjani represents the epitome of selfishness. He will pursue his writing at any cost to himself and, to his family and his friends. When the two friends get married, it is Anjani who is able to build a happy relationship with his wife, unlike Shanjoy whose relations with his own wife go downhill from the very initial days of their marriage.

But a loving and caring wife, a comfortable home, mean very little to Anjani, who thinks that self-inflicted misfortunes might act as a catalyst to inspire a new zeal into his writing. One day he abruptly leaves his home to disappear into a Bombay slum, in the fetid labyrinths of which he would spend rest of his life questing for new stories to write. In his mad zeal he punishes not only himself, but also his family, who are all traumatized by his inexplicable disappearance. But the pain he is causing does not bother Anjani, he is a driven man who cares only about his long periods of creative work, followed by bouts of heavy drinking and outbursts of savage sexual conquest. He breaks all contact with his family, and does not even care to inform them where or how he lives

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Shanjoy takes it upon himself to trace his friend, but that is no easy feat, for Anjani has no desire to meet people from the idyllic past that he has left for good. It is Shanjoy's long search for his friend that seems to have gone into inspiring the novel's title, "And Where, My Friend, Lay You Hiding". When Shanjoy manages to find his friend, he fails to comprehend what sort of inspiration Anjani could possibly get from living in a decrepit slum. In his reply, Anjani describes his new inspirers

> Human beings-all sorts of them, stripped of pretensions. From crooks to good people. Raw human nature. Where else will you get them? On Malabar Hill? Where the most cultivated pretenders of this city hide behind a tie and a stripped shirt?

The bizarre and uncompromising callousness with which Anjani tramples over his own needs and that of his own family is difficult to digest.

The novel is an interesting foray into the mind of a person obsessed by his own creativity, though it has to be said that the plot does evoke a strong sense of déjà vu. Somerset Maugham's brilliant novel The Moon and the Sixpence revolves around a theme that is almost a mirror image of the book under review. In Moon and the Sixpence, it is Charles Strickland who walks out on his family, in order to spend rest of his life painting Strickland travels from Europe to Tahiti where he paints some of his best painting works, correspondingly Anjani Prasad's travels from Mirapur in Uttar Pradesh to a Bombay slum, where he finds his artistic vision and is able to write some of his best stories.

All the minor drawings in both the books are extremely effective, and the simplicity of the narratives is as notable. But whereas Maugham's narrative was lot more focused on the travails of Strickland, Ananda Mukerji's book suffers from frequent digression into areas that have little to do with the primary theme.

Anoop Verma

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The Train That Had Wings: Selected Short Stories of M. Mukundan, tr., Donald R. Davis. Jr., The University of Michigan: Ann Arbor. 2005. Pp 135.

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Short fiction has always maintained a unique standing in modern Malayalam biterature. Over the decades, the practitioners of this form have experimented with content and form like none else, and have related to the mented to the literary sensibilities of various generations of Malayali readers in a fundamentally interactive mode. During the late fifties and sixties of the last century, the Western existentialists and South American revolutionary writers mpelled Malayali fiction writers on a compelling exploration of the inner man set against the outer world. It is also significant that many of these writers had left Kerala and were living and travelling in big cities like Delhi and Mumbai. Their expatriate experience also became an impetus for them to negotiate their parochial bonds by creating an almost tragic literary idiom that reflected the irrationality of set identities. While most of them had very critical views of the romanticised socio-centric aesthetics of the Progressives, some were also provoked by the sprouting Leftist dream of liberation and were eager to assimilate the western modernist's angst about the grand narrative. With exceptions like M.T. Vasudevan Nair, V.K.N, and Madhavikutty (Kamala Sorayya) who found their own niches in the literature, a new breed of writers such as Anand, O.V. Vijavan, Kakkanadan and M.Mukundan thus began determining the modernist mainstream course of Malayalam fiction from their residences outside their homeland.

M. Mukundan (b.1942) is well-known for his engaging portrayal of life in the culturally diverse small former French colony of Mahe. But one can readily see that the Indian locales and coordinates in his works are only a backdrop for his perpetual themes of anomie, captivity, freedom etc., derived from an intellectual involvement with those from Sartre to Che Guevera. Mukundan's enduring concern has been the gloomy middle ground of compromised humanity that modern man is heir to. His own experience of living outside Kerala as a diplomat in the French Embassy in Delhi, also helped him fictionalize events and situations that spell out – to quote his translator Donald R. Davis Jr. – his "vision of modernity as cosmopolitanism" wherein his characters are dreadfully united in their experiences of loss of identity, institutional repression, apprehension pervading Mukundan's stories that captures a Western translator's interest.

Rizio Yohannan Raj / 203

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The collection titled The Train that Had Wings which contains Donald R. Davis Jr's translation of Mukundan's sixteen selected short stories could R. Davis Jr's translation of the central universal theme of freedom, with other aspects of a specific of the control with other aspects of a specific of the control with other aspects. which is considered in relation with other aspects of existence like confinement, responsibility, loneliness, etc. For instance, the concept of liberation is examined in relation with anonymity in the story, "Radha, Just Radha", where the lead character finds that her familiar world no longer recognizes her. Her bewilderment verges on madness, either hers or the outer world's. The haunting concern here is the dialectic of freedom/ absurdity inherent in human life and the dread of apprehending one or the other as true at an unexpected moment. The notion of familianty is re-examined in "Tea", which presents a very common family situation where an aged father finds the presence of his helpful kin as bondage, and chooses to shut himself out in his loneliness, an act which paradoxically transforms itself into an exercise in freedom. "Bathroom", on the other hand, demystifies all sanctity accorded to man's subjective perception of freedom by throwing Purushottaman, its protagonist - who had miraculously actualized his free will by turning into a fly - into a strange and unforeseen situation that claims his life in a flash. The bizarre element in the metamorphosis of Purushottaman gains the dimension of the primordal in "Breast Milk" where a child who is denied his instinctual choices finds them in the animal world.

The sense of futility of the quest and its concomitant frustrations lead Mukundan's characters into a denial of existent social and moral values, and very often end them up in a confrontation with death. The march unto death in Mukundan's stories present three different ways in which modern man encounters fatality: as a victim, as an agent, as a witness.

Jayan, the little boy in "Five-and-a Half-year Old", the couple in "They Are Singing", and the protagonist and his prostitute in "O Prostitutes, A Temple For You" are driven by an inner force—"I'll go by myself from here" (Five-and-a Half-year Old); "Let's die. Let's die. Let's die. ("They Are Singing"), "Come." The River called. Holding the hand of a prostitute, he entered the water" (O Prostitutes, A Temple For You) - which make them walk into death as willing agents of self-annihilation, which represents for them the dream of freedom. Even in the title story "The Train That Had Wings" the hero and his wife prepare to walk into "Delhi filled with sepulchers": "Let us go then."

The double-edged story "I, the Scavenger" shares paradigmatic connections with the first story of the collection, "Office" as with another story. "Topsyred Life" of story, "Tonsured Life". These three may be called bond stories where the

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protagonists are held captive by their work. "Office" shows how a protagonal potentially and reduced to a near automaton. The nameless protagonist of the story, who is referred to as the inclusive pronoun 'he', becomes a prototype of captivity in a rapidly moving world. The irony lies in the fact that all his fast and methodical work cannot earn him even one moment of spontaneity. In "I, the Scavenger" the given job of a scavenger is at once an explicit token of respectability and an implicit sign of victimization for the hero. In this reversal of the traditional literary treatment of the occupation where the scavengers themselves view their job as mean and disgraceful, and attempt to escape it, Mukundan duly accords it the dignity of labour, and brings the focus to other hidden areas of repression as seen in the hero's gradual and inescapable identification with the ambience of his job, and in his unwitting indebtedness to an external agent who controls his entire life and even leads him to his grave. In "Tonsured Life" we see the lead character being called out of one form of captivity into another. He is led out of his office by a certain Lakshmanlal Pvarilal Panditji through a surrealistic journey that ends in his being spat in the face by the Pandit for performing a simple act of compassion. In all these three stories, the characters are involuntary victims of the establishment that curbs their existential freedom of choice. In "River and Boat", too, it is the external societal agents that send off Bhaskaran to an uncertain voyage. The questions at the end of the story are poignant:

"Would he reach the other shore? Would he return?" Two powerful stories of the collection present the narrative voices as witnesses to death. "Delhi 1981" present two eye witnesses of a violent assault and rape as the representatives of the entire Indian people who have a passive or, worse, secretly encouraging attitude towards violence; Rajinder Pande and Kishore Lal watching the brutal scene down from their top floor are almost cheerleaders at a gallery—witnessing and applauding mindlessly. In a different approach to witnessing, "Piss" presents the narrator who follows a moneylender, Kumaran Nayar, and happens to watch the latter, in a fit of rage, pissing on the pyre of a man who died without paying his money back. Incensed by this horrific scene, the narrator himself loses control and kills Kumaran Nayar with a stone. In this bizarre episode of the witness turning into an agent of death, Mukundan brings home to us a critique of the repulsive witnessing as in "Delhi 1981". Here, choosing to kill the loathsome other is seen as a way to release as different from the stories that see self-destruction

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"Parrots" and "The Seventh Flower" are two stories in the collection the obstacles in the path that find their means of negotiating the obstacles in the path to freedom The gentleman in "Parrots" brings himself to free the caged parrots that obviously symbolize modern man's mechanical, monotonous lifestyle. In "The Seventh Flower," the heroine equates freedom with unquestioning trust. She seems to have set out on a quest for such absolute trust with the touchstone of a seeming fantasy, which she holds to be true, and finally finds a liberating faith in the man who marries her.

It is admirable that Mukundan weaves a whole lot of fictional narratives around the single theme of freedom, which ultimately become studies of the complex levels of the experience of freedom in man's inner and outer worlds. By selecting these sixteen stories the translator has been able to give a textual integrity to the collection with the notion of freedom as its core which is aptly reflected in the title "The Train that Had Wings". While these are indeed worthy of approbation, one cannot altogether overlook the thematic and formalistic limitation of Mukundan's fiction. The deft craft and variety of the narrative hardly make good the lack of creative innovation. In a sense, Mukundan's narrative can be seen as a modernist cosmopolitan makeover of what MI. Vasudevan Nair does within a neighbourhood frame. While this fitted perfectly into the general literary environs of the 1960s, one has to realize that today's fiction the world over has come a long way from there, and it is indispensable that our writers at least keep up with the times, if not set its pace.

Donald R. Davis Jr.'s translation is by and large fluent, but he has not quite grasped the nuances of colloquial Malayalam as is evident in some of the translated passages. For instance, in "I, the Scavenger" the conversational usage of language is overlooked and word to word rendition of phrases are given in many a place, thus resulting in phrasal awkwardness ridiculous expressions like 'hop a thieves train', the literal translation of 'kalla vanti kayaruka' which means 'take a train without travel document, calling local vendors 'businessmen'; referring to a teenage girl as a 'tellor-fifteen year old' while the English language does not have an equivalent idiomatic expression for the Malayalam 'pathu-pathinanchu vayassu' which means 'around fifteen years of age'. Surprisingly, there are a few places of inexplicable idiomatic and grammatical clumsiness, too: 'She climbed into the grammatical clumsiness in the grammatical clumsiness i into the queen's grave and lied down' ("They are Singing"), 'Standing and standing him and standing, his feet ached' ("Office"), "When I recall that I am able to wear that same wrife to wear that same uniform..." "He was a drinker." ("I, the Scavenger") Barring these slip-ups and a general proclivity towards literal translation

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

at the cost of linguistic elegance, the collection is produced excellently at the cost with a detailed and insightful introduction by the translator. It would be with a decimination of such translations of regional Indian language texts.

Rizio Yohannan Raj

Exploring Shakespeare: The Dynamics of Playmaking by S. Viswanathan, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2005, Pp.286. Rs. 400/-

The enchantment of the Bard of Avon shows no sign of waning. New productions, both traditional and experimental continue to be staged around the world; filmic adaptations of his plays are being made emphasizing their universal appeal; his plays are being re-assessed on the page and the stage by researchers, performers, and critics. Historical and textual controversies regarding his work and life still invigorate critical discussions.1 Nearly four hundred years after his death, Shakespeare's work is more accessible, and more relevant, than ever.

William Shakespeare has a special niche in India. T.B. Macaulay's recommendation of teaching English language and canonical literature to all British subjects may have installed the British writers in the Indian education system; but the reason for their presence in the post-Independence scenario is because they have claimed a place in the Indian heart. Of all the English writers, the impact of Shakespeare must be the most pervasive and enduring.2 The intrinsic expressiveness of his works keeps drawing people back to them. Their appeal is trans-generational. Scenes from his plays, if not the entire plays, introduce Indian schoolchildren to the effect of greed, avarice, ambition and disloyalty in human affairs; the university students and research scholars continue to grapple with the kaleidoscopic range of his genius and have neither fathomed the depths of the human psyche that he has explored nor scaled the superlative heights of his poetic imagination.

Considering the dearth of performance orientation in most educational institutions, the general trend of Shakespeare studies as a component of an orthodox syllabus has been literary. The plays are usually 'read' like novels and discussed in terms of themes, characters, imagery and so on. Occasionally a few enterprising teachers try to introduce the 'dramatic'

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element by collaborative reading methods. But generally, the tendency is to disregard or forget that Shakespeare was as much a product of the Elizabethan social and political forces as of its theatre of dialectical conflicts and hence his plays reflect the processes of "collective negotiation and exchange" of their historical context, capable of conveying something meaningful to contemporary audiences.

A new addition to the list of must-read books on Shakespeare is S. Viswanathan's Exploring Shakespeare: The Dynamics of Playmaking that combines analyses of particular plays and the institutions, in education and theatre, which have been built around them. The twenty-one essays of the volume were written at different times and published separately, Since they explore "different devices or certain generally less noticed processes" of Shakespearean dramaturgy, Viswanathan has wisely brought them together under a common rubric to explain the strategy of Shakespeare's "dramatico-theatrical communication" (ix, xii). In the brief Introduction to the book, the author explains, "These processes, often participating as they do both in the formation and structural movement of the plays and in their actual theatrical dynamics...supply part of the driving energy behind the dynamics of the plays" (xii). Taken together, the devices/processes represent two significant modes deployed brilliantly by the dramatist for theatrical expressiveness. One mode is described as the "exploratory-creative" mode used by Shakespeare, which makes optimum use of the resources of language and expression, as constituents of his perception and conception, enabling the embodiment of his poetry as the vehicle of his imaginative creativity. The second mode consists of the operativeness of the devices/processes as signifiers to convey the cultural-political significances of the plays.

The essays are divided into three groups. Section One is titled 'Across the Canon' and carries essays that deal with a particular convention as it operates in a cross-section of plays in the canon. Taken up for discussion are some well-known stock-in-trade devices or tools of the Elizabethan dramatists like the soliloquy, dramatic induction, the play within a play, the use of tropes or conceits like the sleep and death coalescence, metamorphoses [e.g. of Actaeon], movement across the stage as syntagma to indicate paradigmatic dramatic depth; or the use of single-speech characters and/or disappearing characters, and of 'shadows'. It is said that the very architecture of Shakespeare's theatre was emblematic. According to Visyanother Court of the to Viswanathan, Shakespeare makes very delicate and subtle use of the older theatrical tradition older theatrical traditions and invariably extends their parameters to give The Section also contains essays offering fascinating analyses of them deeper and more intense dimensions.

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features like "illeism" [when the dramatist makes a character speaking features like "illeism" [when the dramatist makes a character speaking in the first person, refer to himself in the third person "not simply as the', which would be illeism proper, a traditional grammatical mode, but by a name" (4) for a specific purpose]; the scene within a scene [as different from the play within a play device]; and the creation of poetic illusion with the device of 'inset'. The author claims that Shakespeare effectively exploits the complexities of dramatic illusion, especially "the multiconsciousness' of the Elizabethan audience and the part played by it in the interesting ambivalences of the process of dramatic illusion" (17) for maximum dramatic impact.

The essays in Section Two address the operativeness of a particular process or phenomenon in a particular play, as for instance the correlation between visualization and 'visuality' in Hamlet, the multiple connotations of 'question' in Hamlet, the uses of 'topoi' in Coriolanus, theatricality and mimesis in Anthony and Cleopatra and The Winter's Tale. Shakespeare's genius is such that he can take a numinous reality and orchestrate its many modes so that all responses to it can transfigure together. To achieve this, the instrument that he uses is language—specifically, language in performance.

Viswanathan's accentuation of certain inherent features of the 16th and 17th century British drama as intrinsically performative, alters from the very beginning the assumptions on which many traditional kinds of analyses are based. His is the kind of study that focuses upon and incorporates the essential aspect of Shakespeare's work, its theatricality. He illustrates the extraordinary range and diversity in the use of the devices and processes by the dramatist nonpareil that releases the subtextual and subliminal energies in the plays. The essays in the two sections demonstrate not only a comprehensive and thorough knowledge of the plays but a critical acumen of a high order. Viswanathan's discussion connects without strain to earlier scholarship and extends the debates in insightful and relevant ways.

Section Three titled 'Intercultural Perspectives' presents a crossover or a comparative approach that uses the lens of Sanskrit and Indian dramatic conventions to study some of the Shakespearean play practices. The attempt to apply principles of Sanskrit dramaturgy to Shakespeare's plays—as for instance, dhvani to Macbeth; the use of 'dream' as dramatic device in Shakespeare and Bhasa; the effects of trompe l'oeil in the plays of Shakespeare, Bhasa and Kalidasa—is both commendable and heuristic. In comparisons are not 'yoked with violence together' but present with an edge of challenge fascinating explorations of the aesthetics of performance of two vastly different cultural and social contexts.

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Written in a lucid and an engaging style, this is a useful volume which contributes significantly to Shakespeare scholarship. In keeping with the Bard's own attitude, the value of the book lies in its pragmatic approach It calls the 'spectator' into the Shakespearean theatre to recover some structures and devices that could suggest ways to explore and understand the dynamics of the dramatist's prodigious creative realm. The analyses do not impair but add to the pleasure of returning to Shakespeare,

Notes

- Much has been written about Shakespeare yet he remains sphinx-like. A recent biography, Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare [WW Norton and Co, 2004], written by the renowned Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt, has renewed interest in his enigmatic life. The Arts and Humanities Research Council, University of Birmingham, UK
 - has announced a research grant of £358,435 to fund the project Interrogating Cultural Value in the 21st Century: the Case of Shakespeare' to begin at the Shakespeare Institute in October 2006. This is a major initiative among many to assess the relevance of Shakespeare's plays in the 21st century.
 - London papers reported that on 14th July 2006, a near-perfect copy of Shakespeare First Folio sold for £2.8million.
- Perhaps only Wordsworth and Keats enjoy the same popularity. 2
- Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations [Clarendon Paperbacks, 1990]: 3

Tutun Mukherjee

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The Lake Fewa and a Horse, by Yuyutsu R.D. Sharma, New Delhi, Nirala Publications.

Yuyutsu R.D. Sharma is a poet who has an enormous appetite for life, a poet who exults, rejoices even, in the creation. In these Fewa poems he responds to life with sensuous delight and affection. They glow with warmth.

Some poets are so hardened, so tough-skinned, so rhinocerized that, as Eugene Ionesco said, a single flower wouldn't grow on them, but Yuyutsu, thank god, bursts into bloom at the first tender touch be it from a person or a place. a person or a place, a mountain or a river. He flowers in and out of season

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because he is alive to the awe, to the adventure of life. Angels can fly because because take themselves lightly. Yuyutsu is a luminous being of levity.

they take the An Indian by birth and upbringing, he has been a lively creative An Indian by birth and upbringing, he has been a lively creative presence in Nepal for many years and has had a vitalizing effect upon poetry in this country. As a spirited mentor he has helped many of the younger in this country. As a spirited mentor he has helped many of the younger poets to get in contact with their own vital creative energies. His White Lotus Book shop is a petalled place of light, a fragrant sanctuary of poetry; a refuge for those battling onwards across the snowy immensity of the white page; a place where you can become a voyager in the universe of your imagination; a place where you are allowed to have immaculate perceptions, perhaps, even, immaculate conceptions.

I admire Yuyutsu's descriptive acuity, his verbal precisions, his exactitudes. He knows about the enduring clarity of the right words. Denise Levertov, an American poet I greatly admire, stated somewhere that poets, having language in their custody must recognize it as another form of life, a common resource to be cherished and cared for, in the same way that we should show a responsible concern for the earth and it's waters and all its teeming life forms.

Yuyutsu is the kind of poet who is very responsible in his duty to language and careful about its integrity. He resists sloppiness and limpness of language by giving things their true name. In his poems joy, love, grief, loneliness are given a local habitation and a name. In poems like "River: Morning" we hear the language voicing itself at its most acute, singing itself into the light:

Cruel River Knows each time

I come to brood Over her roaring waters

Each time I come To her deafening banks

To gleam my dreams Over the plump flanks of her warm body

Each time I come To pour the last of my life's salt

In the ringing gorges Of her sonorous frame Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri A bone breaks In my smouldering chest

And a wrinkle appears Across the shriveled leaf of my life.

He is a poet of concrete presences; of tangibility; a poet with a Chekovian eye for detail, the significant detail.

I love the fresh spontaneity of his poems, their tuned-in utterance, their turned-on urgency. He writes with an audacity that I find appealing and uplifting. These poems know no bounds, no borders, no barricades. Like light they are boundless in their capacity to cross over, to connect. They succeed in being both intimate and cosmic, rustic and shamanistic. I'm convinced by the assured sounds they make. They connect me to the sacred and the elemental.

Yuyutsu is a visionary of the real:

Rain walks over the chest of the lake

Making it alive With its lover's electric touch,

Tense, taut.

But then it stops, This rain drumming the belly of the lake. more a

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A lonely boat Appears somewhere

Between the shafts Of sunlight

(A Rainbow)

He looks at things with a clear-sighted attentiveness; a purity of attention. In a lovely poem by Ted.Deppe, a contemporary American poet, he quotes Wittgenstein talking to the crows and urging them "look very closely before you think and only then, if ever, speak." It seems to me that Yuyutsu has trained his eye to look intently, to look intelligently, to see "the sun, a plump trained his eye to look intently, to look intelligently, to see "the sun, a plump trained his eye to look intently, to look intelligently, to see "the sun, a plump trained his eye to look intently, to look intelligently, to see "the sun, a plump trained his eye to look intently, is a sensuously detailed poem that shows Mountains of Mustang. "Mules" is a sensuously detailed poem that shows how attentive he is to the immediate.

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Mules

On the great Tibetan Salt route they meet me again

Old forsaken friends...

On their faces Fatigue of a drunken sleep

From carrying
Illustrious flags of bleeding ascents.

Cartons of iceberg, mineral water bottles, Solar heaters, Chinese tiles, tin cans, carom boards

Sacks of rice And iodinesed salt from plain of Nepal Terai.

His poetry by its attentiveness to sight and sound makes us readers more aware, more alert. It intensifies our perceptions and reveals to us that the world of the ordinary conceals the extraordinary. May the shamanistic journeys of this mystic of the domestic go on and on.

"It takes little talent to see clearly, what lies under one's nose" according to W.H. Auden, "a good deal of it to know in which direction to point that organ". Auden was wrong! It takes genius to see clearly what lies under one's nose. But Auden was right, sometimes, especially when he observed that "toilets" was an anagram for T.S. Eliot. Yuyutsu is a superbly gifted seer. For him it's a question of seeing so much clearer than the rest of us; of doing to people and places what the light does to them. He is focused. He sees what other person has forgotten to see. He has eyes sharp as inopeners; they cut through cleanly to the real.

A lonely brook

By the edge of A lonely brook

A lonely woman Waits for a stranger to come

And burst The ice frozen between her thighs

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

To make a flame Of her cold sleep

To suck the fog
Of her lungs with the fire of his tongue.....

(A Lonely Brook)

Lord Norbery was an 18th century Dublin judge. He was a hard exacting man by all accounts with a wicked streak of humour. Once, while sentencing a man to death for stealing a pocket watch, he quipped, "you made a grab at time idiot but you caught eternity". A Draconian measure for such a petty offense. However that phrase, that sentence can be appropriated in a more positive manner, of course, to describe the art of Yuyutsu R.D.Sharma. In these poems it seems to me, he has managed to grasp the moment of recognition, the moment of revelation in order to capture it forever. In a world of flux and transience he illuminates small moments with a lyrical intensity. They are experiences made vivid by the alchemy of his art.

Best poems

The kisses you Refused were the best

Like the poems On the lake I didn't write.

(Best Poems)

A sense of readiness, an openness to experience, these are virtues!

sense very strongly in these poems.

The journey motif is very important in the work. After all the collection is mostly a hymn of colour to the Annapurna area, a psalm in praise of place, a deeply-felt expression of devotional gratitude to a place and to a people near and dear to the poet. To benefit from a journey you have to cultivate a sense of awareness, a readiness to experience whatever the journey brings forth. Even a long walk around your bedroom can be awe-inspiring. A climb up the stairs can be a breath-taking trek. If you don't take any exercises a brisk walk to your vitamin bottle every morning can be a life enhancing experience. All of these strolls can be outings in the imagination, rambles in the psyche.

Another trait that I admire in his work is wisdom. How to become wise is a quest that we are all engaged in. How to repose in the stability

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of truth. Once upon a time a little boy asked his shrewd, sharp-witted grandfather how he became wise.

"I'm wise", said the grandfather sagely, "because I have good judgment."

"But how do you get good judgement?"

"Well, you get good judgement from experience." "But grandfather, how do you get experience?"

"() you get experience", replied the grandfather, thoughtfully, "from poor judgement."

Cathal Ó Searcaigh

Racists, by Kunal Basu, Penguin Books, Pp. 214, Rs.250/-

On a deserted island off the coast of Africa at the end of the 19th century, two infants one a black male and another a white female are left in the care of a young white nurse whose muteness leaves the children to grow up in the wilds unaffected by human speech or civilisational contact of any kind. Carrying out a unique experiment of humans growing up in the raw are two scientists, one a British and the other a French, and as the children grow up more or less like beasts oblivious of the sound of human speech and their only visual experience besides the nurse being the two scientists and their white assistant who visit the island infrequently to measure the growth of the children's cranium, nature and human emotions take their own course abruptly ending the experiment which would have shown who was the superior of the two, the white or the black. Kunal Basu who teaches at Oxford, sets out to charter the course of racism in the western world, but at the end of his narration leaves one lost with a feeling of emptiness and of having been dragged in into quite an unnecessary and improbable plot which is further fouled up by an ending that is nothing but contrived to put it rather mildly. Nicholas Quartley the assistant to Professsor Samuel Bates of the Royal College of Physicians takes off with Norah and they leave the island taking with them the girl child to where else would you think to think but the west, with the story line having the black male child convenient. niently wrenched out of the life of his young play mate and the pages of the book when he is kidnapped by sabre rattling pirates who have suddenly descended upon the island in their mean little ship. The assistant-nurse crush withstanding, and Norah the nurse actually not mute but only just

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pretending all this while as the reader is told subsequently (for how else can courtship proceed effectively without both being able to speak to each other), the stage is well set for a wrap up of a weird experiment that need not actually have been initiated to start off with. Is Basu writing about racial

On quite on another plane, Basu in depicting the animal instincts and base cunning of the growing up infants, paints a fairly accurate picture of a major slice of humanity that endlessely and very competitively keeps clawing away at each other all the time, manoeuvering for power, position and pelf. Shorn of a friendly environment, human company of any kind and basic education which enables further reading and writing providing a universal window to the lives and times of others, humans irrespective of their genes could grow up just like those in the animal kingdom. In another manner then can pristine nature over a period of time overcome the modernism and pull of a loud civilisation, provided of course a setting of this kind was manageable and could be enforced. Or is Basu crafting another message about the perceived disparity in races that till today might exist in some remote parts of the world. Or is it the well-known North-South divide of the world that will take some time in making its retreat. These are some of the disturbing questions that the magic island of Arlinda raises where characters like Monsieur Jean-Louis Belavoix of the Societe Ethnologique de Paris, Belavoix, Quartley and Norah reside and experiment to their heart's content.

The novel, the third after The Miniaturist and The Opium Clerk, is 50 relentless, persistent in pursuit and one directional in proving whether one race is better than the other (an exercise that ends in futility, however, due to circumstances on the ground), that quite unnoticed the author seems to have been overtaken by a bit of tender romance which brings to a premature end the cranky experiments of some very funny and absent minded scientists and all those who have been financing them. So then is it a study of medical science, human psychology or the shadow of a racial block that an Indian author settled abroad is highlighting, and sending out a message that nature cannot be tinkered with and will reign supreme in the end inspite of man's mechanization and cunning. In the end, however, nothing seems to go anywhere in the book, with the experiment having been aborted, the theories of the scientists lying in disarray, one integral part of the human specimen kidnapped, and a young assistant carrying away his love to better climes so that they could live together with the children that they had set out to save from two scheming scientists.

All is, however, not lost in Basu's intellectual foray into human ioural sciences. behavioural science, and the imponderables that often accompany man's

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actions. The smell and sounds of an African island that knows no master ("the tide is high now, the roaring sea answering the call of screaming gulls"), the grandeur of nature and its all pervasive retribution on mankind when the necessary levelling has to be done, and the direct and captivating prose, does succeed in a manner of sort in injecting some movement and life in an otherwise drab, colourless and unnecessary journey.

Himmat Singh Gill

Contemporary Literary Criticism: Theory and Practice. Vol. I & II., N.D.R. Chandra, Authors press, Delhi, 2005. Pp 673; Rs.1,450/- per set.

Ever since I. A. Richards produced his seminal work, The Principles of Literary Criticism in 1924 and William Empson his book titled Seven Types of Ambiguity in 1930, literary criticism has continued to move forward. While the earlier criticism followed the hallowed practice once adopted by Aristotle in Poetics in which the text was put to a close critical analysis, things changed rather dramatically with the appearance of Jacques Derrida in the 1960's on the European scene. It was he who initiated the concept and practice cailed Deconstruction.' With a series of books he established a new tradition in this area. Like Sigmund Freud's psychological theories and Karl Marx's political theories, Derrida's deconstructive strategies, which take off from Ferdinand de Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of the verbal sign, have subsequently established themselves as an important part of postmodernism, especially in poststructural literary theory and text analysis. Though the deconstructive principles of Derrida and later critics are well established, they remain somewhat controversial. Not unlike all other areas of knowledge and industry in the field of literary criticism too what got initiated in, the 1960s in Europe has taken all these years to reach the Indian shores in the 21st century via this present publication—apparently with a big bang.

The present publication in two volumes is an attempt to put together 84 write-ups of literary criticism by Indian authors, who teach in the Indian universities and colleges. The idea was to introduce Indian practitioners and teachers (i.e. the local academia) of the art and science of literary with what was or had transpired elsewhere. With suspect teaching habits of the Indian academia in what they read and teach, the present

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attempt is like a Divine intervention for the better. In the words of the

The most wide-ranging and comprehensive collection of its kind in India, Modern Literary Criticism: Theory and Practice and Contemporary Literary Criticism: Theory and Practice offer selections from 84 contributors representing major developments from modernism to recent times. Unlike any other anthology, the papers in the present volumes combine theory and practice bridging the gap between these two. The volumes are particularly rich in modern and postmodern literary theory and criticism covering all the major schools and movements such as Existentialism and Nihilism, Socio-historical Criticism, Marxist and Sociological Criticism, Psychological Criticism, Archetypal and Myth Criticism, Formalism and New Aesthetics, Structuralism and Linguistic Criticism, Comparative Aesthetics, Culture, Translation and film theory, Postmodernism, Post Structuralism and Deconstruction, Reader Response Criticism, Feminist Literary Theory Post-Colonialism, Canon and multiculturalism, New-historicism, Ecocriticism and so

In brief, it is an ocean full of gems out of which one could pick and choose according to his/her preferences. The other reason was to help the youngsters as compared to the oldies, should be offered readable and teachable material, which they would otherwise have found it ever so difficult to lay their hands on. Interestingly, the Editor himself declares his work as a 'monumental' accomplishment. It would appear that modesty is a virtue seldom discerned among Indians, despite the fact majority of the world's yogis and saints were perhaps born in this subcontinent. He seems to have arrogated to himself a role, which is self-fulfilling.

The present two-volumes on Contemporary Criticism do fulfill 1 requirement and perhaps a vacuum too. There are not many books on the subject and definitely not all that informative. If for nothing else for this reason alone the Editor deserves our compliments.

A good Indian attempt worthy of appreciation.

R.P. Singh

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Collected Poems: 1970-2005 by Keki Daruwalla, Penguin Books, Pp.355, Rs.350/-

"The legs don't move sometimes the back turns over like a river changing beds sometimes the eye gropes towards an object - bat-instincts, at times the arms thrash around my dreams like windmills.

But the legs are withered roots memory has slipped up somewhere for I don't remember what hit me in the spine to turn the legs torpid."

(My Poetry)

He is not an easy poet at most times. "He writes so simply, damn him/ that learned men/are hard put to understand him." He is, in fact, probably, the most complex of the Indian English poets, of the past as well as the present. Not only has his growth been gradual, his concerns as well as preoccupations in terms of content, form and themes have been varied and comprehensive. History, and its recollection, being a significant one. There hardly seems an emotion, from the sublime to the ridiculous — as the jargon goes — that does not find an echo or expression in these pages.

In his poetic growth of three-and-a-half decades, the outcome of which is 181 poems (the volume also includes, apart from these, 20 new and, or, previously unpublished poems) that have appeared in nine volumes. The first of these, *Under Orion* was published by the Writers Workshop in 1970, and the last *The Map-maker* in 2002. The poetic journey has been significant in many literary terms. He is the most stylized amongst us all, often taking refuge in the vagaries of metre and rhyme, and indulging in not always necessary elaboration of a scene, situation, event, or site. His poems stand apart for the impersonal even in an emotional charged personal circumspection which sometimes tends to undermine the intensity of the

Suresh Kohli / 219

whole experience, especially in his love poems. One reason for this could be his deliberate preoccupation with the craft rather titan the emotion. By exerting himself to achieve an effect he tends to undermine the languid flow

Daruwalla's range has grown with time. There is more space for interpretation visible in his later poems. Some of these have been eternally favoured aid appreciated by the readers as well as the academics and critics. These include 'Suddenly the Tree', 'Mother', 'Death Vignette', Nightscape', The Old Man of the Sea', 'Death by Burial', 'The Ghagra in Spate', Ruminations 1 & 11', 'Death of a Bird', 'Ledge Walker', Boat-ride along the Ganga', 'Pilgrimage to Badrinath', 'The People', 'Hawk', 'The Unrest of Desire', 'Crossing of Rivers', "The Night of the Jackals', 'The Mistress', 'Monologue in the Chambal Valley', Jottings', 'Paradise', 'Caries', 'For My Daughter Anaheita', 'Mehar Ali, the Keeper of the Dead', 'To My Daughter Rookzain', Ruminations at Verinag', 'Chinar', 'History', 'Childhood Poem', 'Insomnia', 'Going Down the Night River', and 'Draupadi'. To this list now can be added the new, longish narrative verses like Bypass', We, the Kauravas', sections of 'Underwater Notes', 'The Death of Distinctions', 'Poem for a Granddaughter', parts of 'The Happy Woman Speaks to Herself, and 'Nurse and Sentinel'.

There is an undercurrent of either the allegorical or the satirical in a lot of his poems, though at times seeming clinical and bordering on the cynical: "bitter, scornful and satiric", as one unsympathetic academic putit But Daruwalla is also capable of the other extreme as well while retaining the magic of the ironic wit. He can also excel in blatant mockery as well. He also has the nagging tendency of bringing in mythical or historical characters which appear forced. His imagery is unique in many ways, and so are his concerns and preoccupations. And that one guesses has a lot to do with his observations of reality. Bloodshed, violence and death often creep into his poems either deliberately or effortlessly. Someone has erroneously observed: "Daruwalla does not project the reality of the situation in terms of sociological or any other kind of realism, but in the re-enactment and reinvention of the terms of the mind." What else can a poet do except sincerely try to reenact and reinvent a situation? His urban orcity vignettes are quite unlike in any other Indian English poets: a dying alienated tribe. He has a poem 'To Fellow Indian Poets' which, actually, is a bitter reflection on all those who profess an anti-Indian English stance.

The landscape Daruwalla projects has an insular quality. His poetry is replete with people who one can identify with. He invariably succeeds in drawing the whole in drawing the whole picture through words and carefully selected images,

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oetry ceeds ages, at times with the parameters of rhymed verse which is not easy. This is not only evident, in what for want of a better expression, in his violent poems but also in what many would like to label as nature poems. 'Chinar' is an eternal favourite. One has no quarrel with either the poet or his critics on either count. It is with his love poems that one feels dissatisfied. They seem invariably lacking in both feeling and intensity. The natural warmth, feeling and involvement are generally amiss.

The word is great, yet there was life before the word. We can't turn romantic, and say we were into bird speech or river-roar then, into the silence of frost or the language of rain. But forest speech and swamp speech came through easier to us. When lightening crashed, the cry of the marsh bird was our cry, and we flung ourselves to the other branch like any other baboon.

Though there were no words, fear had a voice with many echoes. Worship was quieter, adoration spoke only through the eyes or knees.

What was it like before language dropped like dew, covering the scuffed grass of our lives.

(Before the Word)

And between 'My Poetry' and 'Before the Word' is the quintessential Keki Daruwalla; a suave, sophisticated urban voice that has sought to feel and tell all that he found worth recounting and reflecting upon in the thirty-five years of a poet's journey.

Suresh Kohli

Women Writing in India (Vol. II): The Twentieth Century ed. by Susie Thatu and K. Lalita, OUP, New Delhi, 2005, Pp.642, Rs.395/-

One could not have asked for a more inspiring volume than the present one to cultivate an interest in the contribution of women to the body of Indian literatrue. The book is glorious tribute to the monumental achievements of women writers of the legacy left behind by them. It is a tribute to the lives they had lived and the price they paid in their transactions during their lifetimes. There is a wealth of biographical head notes of not merely the well-known authors but even of those reduced to penury, their work neglected and long forgotten.

The editors have clearly stated at the preface that the collection is not exhaustive. Thus we are deprived of the rich Assamese literature which has a long and enduring list of women writers. Neither have been the great Punjabi, Rajasthani, Kashmiri or Sindhi writers been represented. The constraints must have been colossal but apparently not insurmountable for these two brave ladies who were undaunted by the effort required in presenting to the English reading world gems of Urdu, Marathi, Kannada, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, Oriya and Hindi woman writers. The list of acknowledgements give evidence to the grandiose cooperation of the innumerable people who offered their invaluable support to the editors during the compilation of this labour of love. While going through the stories it is important to keep in mind that this is an effort of an era when women who were wives, companions and mothers 'also wrote...'

A critical estimate of women's literature has always been prejudiced. According to Mary Ellmann, male academics and reviewers indulged in a kind of inverted fidelity in the analysis of women's books by treating them upon intellectual measuring of busts and hips! The patriarchal ideology in the nineteenth as argued by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar of the image of the writer as one who is the Divine Creator who fathers his work and the pen being invariably demonstrated as a phallic image; this is a period in time when women could not both write and remain feminine.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of expressive realism almost simultaneously with the realist novel. In the late sixties and early seventies the idea gained strength within feminist criticism that women's experience is a fount of resource. That woman's experiences thus far a hidden secret of insecurity could be articulated to try to make sense of what they observed or felt. Fortunately, the editors, working under the premise that not all literature written by women is

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Much of the literature in this volume sketches the politics and imagination of the forties and fifties into the nineties; about the evolving character of what defines an Indian. In the dynamics of change from an emerging of what country to an underdeveloped country and then to a rapidly developing economy, being Indian is constantly being redefined. The Nehruvian years between 1947 to 1968 marked the passing of a modified version of the Hindu Code Bill in 1955 which was the first legislative initiative that sought to create a uniform law ensuring women some rights to property and succession in addition to treating them as equal to men in relation to marriage and divorce. Widespread disaffection between 1968 to 1975 saw women who had been relatively quiet on the political front after Independence emerge in large numbers to participate in movements that demanded the inclusion of women's questions on the political, social and even religious agendas of the country. They even formed separate women's organizations. Thus the timeless notion of 'Indian Sensibility' has been approached in a more practical manner by trying to understand the nation and nationality not as an essence, but as a historically constituted terrain, changing and contested, and its citizen subjects as subjects-in-struggle, and therefore also always in process.'

It is against this backdrop that literature in this volume has to be approached. In the Urdu segment, a predictable inclusion is Ismat Chugtai's "Lihaf" which brought the author notoriety when she wrote it in 1931. It portrays a lesbian relationship witnessed through the eyes of a child. Rasheed Jahan's "Woh", however, has as its theme a moral awakening of the nameless protagonist to social responsibility. A disfigured and diseased prostitute in purdah with her 'crooked eye' and a ghastly noseless face insists on befriending the protagonist who is a young upper middle class woman for whom 'existence was an expectancy'. Siddhiqa Begum Sevharvi's 'Tara Laraz Rahe Hai' explores the eternal flaw of inequality between being a sister and being a wife. A hard-hitting sentence from the mother nails home the fact: The moment a girl is married—she maybe only twelve—she is no longer young. These glowing cheeks last only a few days. Then when something stirs in the belly, it's all up.

Shivani Pant of Hindi is considered by many to be one of the most Influential feminine voices in India. The character she has sculptured in 'Dadi' he is exposed of being a Pakistani spy she is the one who rescues him from the uncivilized frenzy of mob hysteria and hands him over to the police

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as a law abiding citizen. Women like 'Dadi' are instrumental in holding as a law abiding citizen. Women like 'Dadi' are instrumental in holding citizen. as a law abiding cruze...
together the nation and ushering it safely into the modern era. Manjul Bhagat's 'Dadi'. Again a story of 'Bebeji' is strikingly familiar to Shivani's 'Dadi'. Again a story of an upper Bebeji' is strikingly rammental in bringing about a social change in her own orbit by adopting a lower class family when abandoned by her flesh and blood. Mrinal Pande's powerful post emergency story "Hum Safar" is a study of the eighties. In sharp contrast to the widows in the novels of the reform movement, the widow here is a psychologically rounded character. Voiceless, powerless, statusless, this harried widow displays a pathetic outburst upon her son, the only person around to recognize her presence .Time has undoubtedly left its mark on the standing of the widow in the Indian context.

The Marathi section includes Hamsa Wadkar's memoir of an independent working woman of the 1940s and 1945s who traverses towards a tunnel of tragedy. Kamala Desai is another Marathi writer acknowledged for her intense and sophisticated language. Desai abstained from matrimony for she believed marriage would curtail her independence as a writer. Desai's focus is on selfhood and autonomy. Baby Kamble was the first Dalit woman to write an autobiography in Marathi Jina Amucha (Our Wretched Lives) in 1986. And then there is Gauri Deshpande who abandons even the nuclear family as an institution of the past and portrays her characters as fiercely independent individuals.

Mahasweta Devi dominates Bengali women's literature. In fact, she is widely acknowledged as one of the most powerful voices in India today. She concentrated her writings mostly with the agrarian movements of the late sixties, the formerly untouchable castes and in the late seventies she focused primarily on the tribal of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal

M.K. Indira, of Karnataka started writing at the age of forty-five but established herself as a major voice in Kannada literature. Phaniyamma, a novel loosely based on her great aunt's life is the story of a widow who never complains or boldly rebels but does question and even acts against the irrational demands of tradition when they hurt others. The extract included in this volume is from the later part of the novel when Phaniyamma is about eightytwo. All the severe fasts and difficult pilgrimages she had undertaken to purify herself is placed on the balance when she is requested to help a difficult childbirth of a lower caste woman. The novel was directed by Prema Karanth into a much acclaimed movie that went on to win national and international awards.

In the much acclaimed Tamil writer Rajam Krishnan's story "Kaipidite Kadaloruvanai", the concluding rhetoric is bound to have troubled many an educated " LLan educated "...Her uneducated mother-in -law could be convinced without

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Caipidite d many without great difficulty but how was one to deal with this woman with a masters degree. Honestly, how many of us literate Indians can claim to be truly degree. The fundamental reality is that degrees in themselves are not educated? The fundamental reality is that degrees in themselves are not enough knowledge to always mould a broadminded, erudite personality. Varsha Adalja, Gujarati author of repute researches meticulously on

Varsha Adaija, Gujarad addrof of repute researches meticulously on the background of her subjects before crafting her characters. Which is why after reading 'Bichari Champudi' you can never again pass a little beggar girl dancing in the streets and not be overcome with grief. Adalja's story of a family of traditional folk singers ring so true.

According to critic Jancy James, "In the entire history of women's writing in Kerela, Saraswati Amma's is the most tragic case of the deliberate neglect of female genius." Amma's writing is directed mostly at women in an attempt at shattering their illusions about love and men.

The oral history of Daudala Salamma, a participant of the Telangana People's Struggle transports us to a place and time when history ushered in a change. The People's Struggle was against the forced labour and other exactions by the Nizam of Hyderabad State and Hindu landlords. Women's participation in the movement was indispensable and Salamma, a peasant woman became an efficient squad leader.

The poetry section is intense but glory. Reading so much grief together can prove more of a daunting task than a pleasurable experience. Most of the poetry is on gender inequality, dissatisfaction, rebellion. Vimala's (Telugu) "Vantillu" (kitchen) explicitly moans what the poets and writers have repeatedly implied in this volume:

Damn all kitchens. May they burn to cinders
The kitchens that steal our dreams drain our lives, eat
our days...

That turned us into serving spoons

Nilakshi

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Chaudhry, Sujata (b.1956) Writes poetry in English and Oriya; has three collections of poems in Oriya and one in English to her credit; recipient of Rashtirya Vikas Shiromani Award, Maitreyi Samman, Kadambini Kavita Samman etc.; presently working as Chief Vigilance Officer, National Textile Corporation Ltd., New Delhi. Add: 1-30 Sechool Marg, Jangpura Extn., New Delhi.

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Panne speciali and Go been ex Bikane Calcut Calcut Add: 2 Kolkat Mukherjee, Tutun. Scholar critic and translator in English; her translation of Banaphool's short stories from Bengali into English has been very well received; currently Professor and Head, Department of English, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad 500 046.

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O Searcaigh, Cathal. One of the finest Irish poets; has received numerous honours including the Sean O Riardain Award, The Irish Times Literary Award; the National University of Ireland presented him with an Honorary Doctorate in Celtic Studies in 2002; lives in Donegal, Ireland for six months in a year and in Kathmandu for the remaining six months with his adopted son.

Panne Kunwar (b.1942) Painter; her specialized areas are Indian Gods and Goddesses; her paintings have been exhibited at Sardul Art Gallery, Bikaner, Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Sanskriti Art Gallery, Calcutta and Stuttgart, Germany. Add: 20, Balmukund Macker Road, Kolkata 700 007.

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Mahim Ki Khadi, translation from Marathi, Baal Ki Aap Beeti (Essays) etc.; has written more than 150 plays and features. Add: 11/9, L.I.G. Colony, Vinoba Bhave Nagar, Kurla (West), Mumbai 400 070, Maharashtra.

Sardessai, Laxmanrao (b. 1904- d. 1986) Distinguished Konkani critic, novelist and short story writer; had written fourteen books in Marathi and four books in Konkani which include a novel; one of his short stories won him an International Prize by the New York Berald Tribune in 1951; was the recipient of Goa Kala Akademi Award, Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of essays, Khabari.

Satchidanandan, K. (b.1946): Well-known Malayalam poet and critic; retired as Secretary, Sahitya Akademi; has published more than 20 collections of poetry, 16 collections of translations of poems by Indian and foreign poets, 17 collections of critical essays in Malayalam and English, and edited six collections of poetry (both in Malayalam and English); his works have been translated into several Indian and foreign languages; recipient of Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Gangadhar Meher Award, Kumaran Asan Award etc.

Saxena, Rati (b.1954) Hindi poet and translator. Translates from Malayalam into Hindi; has three translation works to her credit. Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize Add: Add: K.P. IX/624, Vaijayant Chettikunnu, Medical College P.O., Thiruvananthpuram 695 011.

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Sharma, Sunil (b.1958) Critic, fiction-writer and freelance journalist, has one novel A Marxist Critique to his credit; teaches English Literature at the Model College, Thane. Add 502, A-Type Bldg, Madhav Srishi Complex, Godrej Hill Road, Khadakpada, Kalyan (W), Dist. Thane 421 301, Maharashtra.

Shivanath (b.1925) Dogri critic; translates from Dogri into English; has edited *Uttara Digest*. Add: B-505 Purvasha, Mayur Vihar, Phase - I, Delhi — 110 091.

Sidhu, Amrit (b.1968) Freelance writer and translator based in Shimla; have lent her voice for a radio programme aired on FM; currently engage in a project of translating the short stories of celebrated Hindi writer Shaani. Email ID: amrit_sidhu 1968@yahoo.co.in

Singh, R.P. Former Professor and Chairman, ERIC, NCERT. Add: A-4/ 206 Kalkaji Extn., New Delhi 110 019.

Trivedi, Harish (b.1947) Well-known Indian English scholar and critic; has more than ten published works to his credit including the translation of Premchand's biography, Kalam Ka Sipahi, from Hindi to

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English; Professor of English at Delhi University; has been a Commonwealth Scholar, University of Wales and Honorary Research Fellow, University of Birmingham and Visiting Professor, SOAS, University of London. Add: C-12 University Flats, 29-31 Chhatra Marg, Delhi 110 007.

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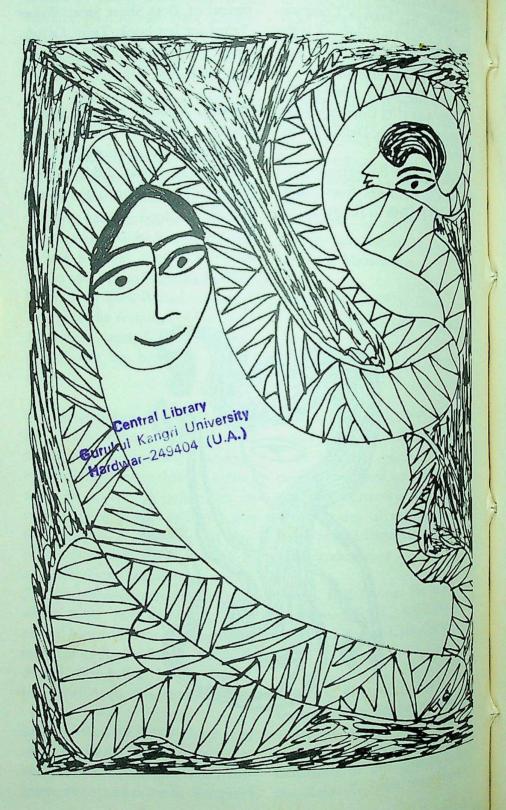
11.

Tulasi, Changti. Telugu short-story writer; also translates from Hindi, Oriya, and English to Telugu; has 14 published works to her credit; recipient of Best Short Story Writer Award for her book, *Tulasi Kathalu*. Add: 5-127, 3rd Street Pant Nagar, Vizianagar 535 003.

Verma, Anoop (b.1966) Indian English short-story writer, novelist and reviewer; has one novel, A Thread of Life to his credit. Add: A 67/1, DDA (SFS) Flat, Saket, New Delhi 110 017.



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It is heartening to note that the University of Delhi has prescribed an anthology entitled, Cultural Diversity, Linguistic Plurality and Literary Traditions in India for the concurrent course in its BA Honours Programme. As a matter of fact, the anthology has been put together by Sukrita Paul Kumar, Vibha S. Chauhan and Budh Prakash for the specific purpose of including this topic in the concurrent course, as they believe that this is the only way to overcome the insularity inherent in studies of a single language or literary tradition. The anthology offers a glimpse of the multicultural complexity that finds its creative expression in different languages at different points of time in Indian history.

The Introduction to the anthology lays out the raison d'etre: "Since language and literary traditions emerge from specific historical and political points of reference, they have to be studied from within their constantly changing cultural frames and not in isolation. The boundaries drawn between various disciplines in academia then have to shed their rigidity and make space for a relatively more comprehensive view of lived reality." A very welcome and fresh approach from one of our English Departments which are otherwise notorious for their insularity.

The editors hope that at the outset a general understanding of the complexity and variety of literary cultures in India, would not only serve as an effective backdrop for smaller and in-depth studies, this would also sensitize the student to the possibilities of their inner connections and dissents with parallel literary traditions. For example, in the first unit of this volume, Sujit Mukherjee's essay 'Propositions' suggests an overview of the indigenous context for a different kind of literary history. Sisir Kumar Das's essay The Mad Lover', in the second unit, draws upon Sufi and Bhakti traditions to demonstrate how different saint poets in different regions, in medieval times, boldly interrogated existing norms and expressed their thoughts and spiritual experience freely in different poetic forms.

Each unit in the volume carries a significant theoretical or critical essay, which complements the three or four creative pieces included in the rest of the unit. In the study of the evolution of languages in India, the interface of language with politics and history must necessarily be examined. The story of Hindi and Urdu, their common origin and then the split between them, as analysed by Amrit Rai, forms the third unit. Political recognition of languages goes a long way in creating a hierarchy of languages. In the sixth

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Unit, it is interesting to read how M.K. Naik presents arguments for and the language which acquired its status at against writing in English, the language which acquired its status through the against writing in English, the country as an Indian colonial enterprise but has gradually come to stay in the country as an Indian colonial enterprise but has garden languages owned convincingly by those who write and read it. While creative writing in English and other Indian languages gets its space in the academic world, tribal voices do not generally fall in the canon, nor are they allowed easy entry into a classroom. This volume creates adequate room for the study of tribal songs from different parts of the country. In the seventh unit of this book, 'Womenspeak', there is a presentation of women's culture dealing with two powerful articulation of feminist perspective. A.K. Ramanujan narrates a popular Kannada folktale and analyses it with the sensitivity of a feminist, while the essay by Nabaneeta Deb Sen engages with not the standardized epic, Ramayana, but with its alternate version written from the point of view of Sita and dismissed by male critics generally as 'incomplete'. This unit gives us a sample of the occasionally heard women's voices of the past, waiting to be studied.

Indian writing in English is steadily carving a niche for itself. Two recent publications from two prestigious publishing houses is an index to this point. One is, The Penguin Book of New Writing from India 2, entitled First Prof. the other, The Harper Collins Book of New Indian Fiction. While the second book has a sub-title 'Contemporary Writing in English' and bears the formidable name of Khushwant Singh as its editor, the first book is somewhat misleading in its title, as you won't know that it is an anthology of Indian English writing only till you read the Publisher's Note (There is no declared editor). It would seem the Penguin has a tacit understanding with its readers that the New Writing From India is happening in English only. The volume, however, is interestingly designed. It reads both ways, one side opening to non-fiction writing while the other to fiction and some poetry too. The reader is only to flip the book for switching from one genre to the other. There are works by unpublished or relatively new authors, and the few established names are also represented by writing in a genre that is new to them. What is quite impressive is the conscious attempt by the publisher to totally disregard the traditional barrier between 'literary' writing and 'commercial' writing. After reading the anthology one tends to agree about what The Hindu wrote, "Unlike the tag 'new' that is often given by desperate advertising agencies to reinvent sagging sales of old products, this volume lives up to its reputation."

The Harper Collins anthology is more straightforward and less invented in the straightforward and less in the straightforward and straightforward novative. It is just a collection of 13 short stories but traversing continents and orbits, styles and themes, in rich, original and frequently surprising ways, and orbits, to the range and depth of Indian writing in English today. Variously lyric, satiric, tragic and fantastic, they are unified in their vigour Variously and humanity. The anthology features a rich assortment of voices from both new authors and established names including Abraham Verghese, Manju Kapur, Githa Hariharan and Amitava Kumar. In his brief introduction Khushwant Singh claims that the stories in this collection have been judiciously selected and represent the best of Indian writing around the world. With characteristic humour, he writes, "Like Indian cuisine, they are as different as idli-sambar of the South is from tandoori chicken of the North, machher jhole from the East coast is from the pao-bhaji of the West. And yet, they still retain a uniquely Indian flavour."

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee Editor

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Ajit Dutta

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↑ jit[kumar] Dutta was born on 23 September 1907 at Dhaka to an Aillustrious family. His father Atulkumar Dutta was a Deputy Magistrate, mother Hemnalini [maiden name GuhaThakurta] loved literature and herself wrote some poems and songs. His grandfather Chandrakumar Dutta had been a Calcutta University graduate from its very second year. Bhupalkumar Dutta, his father's younger brother, was a writer. His mother's younger brother [Suresh] was one of Swami Vivekananda's disciples, Swami Paramananda, who later founded the Ananda Ashram in California. His mother's younger sister Labanya, a girl widow, went to Santiniketan and earned Rabindranath's fatherly care, and was later married to his literary admirer Ajitkumar Chakravarti.

Ajit Dutta lost his father at four. He grew up with brothers and sisters at the crowded family home on Asak Lane. At 14 he met Buddhadeva Bose, one year his junior. By then his early poetic exercises had begun and he was happy to have a kindred soul. This soon blossomed into a rare and lasting friendship. He finished school in 1924 and did his Intermediate from Jagannath College where Premendra Mitra was his senior by a year. In 1926 he came to Kolkata and took admission to Vidyasagar College in BA English Honours, but had to go back to Dhaka because of his elder brother's illness and death. Dhaka University's lectures had already begun and he only found room in the joint Bengali and Sanskrit Honours. In 1929 he finished his BA and in 1930 his MA, in both ranking first. By then he had been regularly publishing poetry (since the poem in the magazine Manasi O Marmahani in 1925), especially in the avant-garde magazines Kallol (1923-30) and Progetting (1927-29). The desired poem in the magazines Kallol (1923-30) and Progetting (1927-29). (1927-29). The latter he was also jointly editing with Buddhadeva Bose. In 1930 appeared his first book of poems, Kusumer Mas (the month of flowers) simultaneously with Buddhadeva Bose's Bandir Bandana (the prisoner's prayet), His first job was temporary teaching at Dhaka University straight after mutually dedicated to one another.

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Unlike his friend Buddhadeva Bose with whom he came to share the same.address from 1938, 202 Rashbehari Avenue, Kolkata 29 (Buddhadeva Bose on the first floor and he on the second), Ajit Dutta was a sparse writer. True he was actively involved with the poetry quarterly Kavita (pub. 1935), had his second book of poems Patalkanya (the maid from the depths: 1938) published from Kavita Bhavan, and was an editor of the first issue of Kavita Bhavan's annual omnibus Baisakhi (1941), yet when it came to his own output he was not prolific. He had himself imputed it to his idleness, but his commercial job too might have impeded him. Anyway, with a gentle romantic sensibility and dexterous handling of verse in Kusumer Mas, he had made his mark and his fame had come to stay. Patalkanya continued that. His subsequent books of poems were Nashtachand (branded moon: 1945), Punarnava (renewal: 1946), Chadar Boi (book of rhymes: 1950), Chhayar Alpana (shadow patterns: 1951), Janala (windows: 1954), Sada Megh Kalo Pahad (white clouds dark hills: 1971). He also had a Kavita Samgraha (collected poems: 1959) and a Shreshtha Kavita (best poems: 1970). That he not only excelled in sensibility but also in craft, was particularly seen in the rhymes he wrote, the nonsense that carried a lot of sense.

Ajit Dutta also wrote some prose, especially personal essays where he left an indelible mark with Janantike (sotto voce: 1949), Mon Pavaner Nao (riding fancy's skiff: 1950) and Saras Prabandha (essays pleasant: 1968). His discursive prose included Bangla Sahitye Hasyaras (the comic in Bengali literature: 1960). Besides he had a good many literary and critical pieces that have been posthumously collected in Prabandha Samgraha (Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi: 2000) and Prabandhaguchehha (Ananda Publishers: 2003). At one point in his literary career Ajit Dutta launched an annual omnibus of his own named Diganta (1946) that ran into five acclaimed issues. Diganta led him to setting up Diganta Publishers (1947) that brought out nineteen important titles.

Ajit Dutta died on 30 December 1979.

Amiya Dev Amiya Dev / 9

Ajit Datta

Brittle Coral

Pride's running sores: the more swollen and putrid they are, the more they spread poison and pestilential disease; everywhere boils of injustice rear their heads: hideous enough, but they leave deeper scars. On the heels of mad dogs ruin arrives like a whiplash: the greater the arrogance, the more time's quicksand sucks; who goes to touch the sun is destined to burn to ashessin is indeed mighty, but how long is its life's lease?

Will man's bloodlust wipe off all that's green? That shame in our arteries—is it meant to be perpetual? Though for today the waxing-moon evening's in vain, yet the moon's bodiless magic, I know, is immortal. To whisper the heart's words in defiance of man's disdain is to be — under a raised hammer — life's brittle coral.

1943 (Baishakh 1350, Bengali era)

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

The Month of Flowers

D'you love flowers? Red flowers of flagrant beauty that hit our eyes so hard that they are bruised? Or shy as the shiuli, bent with its own scent's ooze, ready to fall before the gentlest finger has touched it?

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Has the ketaki brushed your face with its perfume's shawl Has the learning has the garrulous, loud-laughing henna plucked your heart-strings? or the Barrey the kadamba, that adores monsoon drenchings, or the tender buds of the atasi, that timid girl?

I too love flowers. And it's the month of flowers now. Give me your hand, let's visit the flowery bowers. In a secluded arbour I shall whisper in your ears which flowers have filled my life's honeyed hours. Let's tread softly, away from spying eyes. The night air sleeps; let's not wake it with our sighs.

30 November 1928

POETRY

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Dreaming of Old Age

Let this be true: that you and I one day, our arms entwined, doddery, feeble, pale, our eyes dulled, our words slurred, half-shaped, may say in unison, 'Even now we love.'

These eyes will roll; this body will be ugly and stoop; brow and cheeks will wrinkle, lips lose taste. Youth will drip away, but may it leave as dregs youth's last statement, 'We love even today.'

2 December 1928

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Poetry

As when a fond mother bends over her infant's face, het sari-end slipping off, lips eager, hair hanging loose, even so is poetry's new-born nestled in my mind

Ajit Datta / 11

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri drugging, enchanting my whole being this instant.

Lost in ecstasy, my mind plays with its poem, gazing, rapt, at its own creation's beauty.

What wondrous gleams of joy suffuse my heart, burying life's battles and treaties, ententes and enmities!

As a traveller on a rough road, managing to reach a warm inn, sinks his weary body in a private bed, and dozes, enjoying the total relief he feels, even so, after my time in a world soiled, frazzled by the day's toil, I find myself again, and revived by the mind's warmth, win myself this joy.

27 January 1929

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

No Variety in Life

No variety in life – my heart has filled with ennui. Comfort's bitter; I'm jaded and indifferent to things. The blue sky bruises my eyeballs. Enough of enjoying death-like peace for twelve months: it's time to live! Can you tell me how to reach mountain tracks where snow spreads like a desert, where flowers never blow? Or where, upon the firmament's gigantic blotting sheet dark glyphs encode death's terrifying myths?

Or come with me to an awesome lonely pole above which hangs an aurora's brilliant glow, or by the Red Sea, with ripening nuts, where snakes sleek, venomous, speckled, sleep in the shade—spotted leopards too; where a sharp knife-blade may even be dyed by the heart's blood if love is betrayed.

March 1929

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

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The Atheist

I obey no God, but just the mind's commandments; that Non-Existent, who burrows in the believer's brain doesn't scare me. And slavery's not my bent. What remains in Death's cup—I know Life is its name. True, I'm wild and reckless; there's no softness in me; true, I'm an arrogant atheist, bitter of speech. I love to laugh at human stupidities and mock the heart's meaningless and melancholy refrains.

Yet, coming home after an evening spent with you, to the Non-Existent God I send three cheers.

My eyes that burn with mockery savour tears; suddenly this earth's marvellous sky I view with nothing but Love written on it; and as night deepens, on my cussed soul sweet-cool sadness descends.

1929

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Rare Night

Come, let's go outside—where the breeze stirs the leaves. Layers of clouds. There's no moon to see. To the garden ghat: let's sit on the steps of the pond. Let the wind ruffle your hair and sari's end. Darkness will tremble and swirl around your eyes, and like your eyes the inky waters will well. Your footsteps will wake the fairy-fireflies: against the black waters their glad crowds will swell.

Look around you. Isn't it a beautiful night? Such a night may not be given to us again. Let everyone know. I don't give a damn. This pretence, this falsity, this acting—it's a blight! This hushed midnight is time's rarest splinter, a floral interval for our mutual encounter.

²⁸ January 1930

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Ajit Datta / 13

A Fragment of a Poem

Malati, your mind is as wild and restless as a river. It's there, Malati, that I've left my signature.

I know that in this world nothing remains.

Two wings outspread, one black, the other white,

Time, that bird, flies off into the Great Void,

ceaseless in its flight.

The sweep of its wings puts out the meteors' flares and the light of a million stars.

Like a feather fluttering in that great torrent of air I write my poems on the sky's empty blue.

That sky is but your own heart.

Malati, in your mind I've left my signature.

1934

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Verses

Even Boddinath writes verses, I've seen it with my own eyes—with fourteen hefty dictionaries and a *Chalantika* by his side.
On top of that he also hires two D Litts as standbys to help him out if he gets stuck, for who can tell when some ill luck might come his way?—not even Boddi! For instance, when the other day he needed a rhyme with the phrase *nish-ni*, it was a right proper crisis, till they rummaged a hundred files, found *dhrishni*, so Boddi rhymed and galloped away.

2 February 1938

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson 14 / Indian Literature : 236 Othe

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Do you know some tricks of wrestling?
Can you dangle blithely enough?
Otherwise
don't bother
to ride on a tram-car;
you'll fall on the road in a daze and suffer.

Have you had practice in running, leaping, jumping, and flying?
Otherwise
you might get run over
by a lorry,
so don't leave home, there's no hurry.

Are all your teeth in good shape and accustomed to chewing a few stones? Otherwise just go without dinner, for it's half rice and half stone chips, sir!

With steady legs and a steady mind, can you stand on your feet for twelve hours? Otherwise forget about buying yourself a dhoti, moaning in the shop will get you nowhere.

1943

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Ahan

Dibyendu Palit

Chaktibrata returned from the market, sat at the verandah and began to Shrowse through the previous day's newspaper. As he did everyday. When the Kolkata paper reaches here it would already be past midday. As he takes rest that time, he cannot go through it before late afternoon. His eyesight has been failing now-a-days, so he cannot see clearly in dim light. Over and above, the electricity voltage fluctuates, and often lights go off owing to load-shedding. There's no other way than to browse through the headlines today and read for the details the next morning. But he has no complaint about this. What would he do if there were no such changes in retired life?

Bibha is in the kitchen. Their son will come today after three years, and that too, for half a day only. Guessing what items he might prefer, she has not relied on the maid servant. She has herself started cooking some good items after a long time. But she is not feeling at home because of the long gap. She checked the time with her husband three times so far. It seemed to Shaktibrata that expecting his arrival, Bibha was not only happy, but a little tense also. His long absence has perhaps shaken her self-confidence too.

Shaktibrata smiled a little when she asked again, "What's the time?" He said, "Why do you worry about time? The train will arrive around one o'clock. It has not yet started from Howrah-"

"I don't know why, it seems time is running fast." Bibha said this while stirring the pan¹ with a *khunti*. A little later she added, "He might come by consistent of the pan¹ with a *khunti*. A little later she added, "He might come by consistent of the pan¹ with a *khunti*. by car instead of by the train. If he started early in the morning he would have reached by have reached long before. His father-in-law has a car, hasn't he?"

"Of course, he has. After his retirement he has been appointed an

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advisor for a company. Why one, he can have two cars. But—. The leather of his wrist watch was thoroughly wet with sweat. His eyes were drawn towards it. Looking at the watch he said, "The jetlag during the flight from Washington to Kolkata is not negligible. If he arrived yesterday evening he would need a little rest. How would he start early in the morning? Moreover, there are traffic jam and heat—there'd be strain if he came by car. Train is better." As he looked out through the open door Shaktibrata saw that the small front gate was not closed properly, and a stray cow was trying to enter through it. Perhaps he is no less absentminded today. What luck, he has not closed the main gate! If he did not act immediately, it would have got inside and started biting off his flower plants. Shouting 'Gerr-r-r out, ger-r-r-r out' to turn it away, Shaktibrata rushed to close

Though there is a wind outside, the sun has started giving out heat. It will be terribly hot when the train arrives. Being accustomed to the climate abroad for about twenty or twenty-two years, Aban might feel even the morning heat unbearable, what with the lack of airconditioner? It's good he is coming alone. If he came with his wife and children, it would have been more awkward. Looking up at the sky, Shaktibrata tried to see where

the sun exactly was. His eyes were dazzled.

Two days ago when Aban rang up from Washington to inform that on his way to Singapore on a World Bank assignment he would stop at Kolkata for a day or two, would come to Shantiniketan by the morning train and return to Kolkata by evening, then Shaktibrata himself raised the question of strain. Aban gave no importance to it. There was no certainty when they would meet again. Aban replied, "Even if there's strain, I'll come." Shaktibrata asked Bibha to keep the dinner ready for him.

Both Shaktibrata and Bibha were overwhelmed, not by the call from such a great distance, but by their son's strong determination. Especially, Bibha was. At her age a little emotion brings tears to the eyes. Even if tears dry up, the wiping of the eyes with one end of the sari after taking off

the glasses continues for long. Shaktibrata feels the silence. While returning home, Shaktibrata thought Aban had taken the right decision. Otherwise, perhaps they might have to make a dash for Kolkata to meet their son. He does not know if that would have been possible. After Bibha's affliction with arthritis they do not usually go anywhere. Thinking that his wife might feel miserable and her anxiety might increase he also does not plan for any outing alone. He does not remember correctly when they last went to Kolkata. Age and distance together are corroding them from within. Besides, where will they go?

When this question comes to his mind, he cannot think any more.

Dibyendu Palit / 17

As he knows no answer, the question pops up once again to trouble him. As he knows no answer, and I shaktibrata belonged to a time when he could easily have, not one or two Shaktibrata belonged to a life or two but three or four children. They would have grown big enough by now Perhaps they would have spread to different spheres of life. Then he would not have to stop at the question 'where to go?' But the fact is it did not happen. And so the one born takes the place of the others who could have been, but were not, born.

When, as a boy Aban was growing up, he was alone. At times Shaktibrata thought that this loneliness was not good for him. How long can parents keep company? Besides, when they would be no more, who would care for him? He never thought then that they themselves would live a lonesome life one day. Could he even understand Aban correctly? Before the school teacher could realize that in merit and achievement his son would one day go beyond their expectations, his career had already taken a shape, His career graph was so astounding. After his schooling here, he was admitted to a Kolkata College. This happened naturally. After that, when on his own effort, Aban won a scholarship and flew to London for higher studies with the assurance that after his return he would take up a job in this country, Shaktibrata began to doubt for the first time. If he knew that they would feel so lonely, he would not let him be so brilliant. He thought that it would be enough if the son of a school teacher became a professor in a college. When his doubt was confirmed he began to feel that Aban might himself take his own decision. There was success on the one hand, and parents on the other. If success is given so much importance, emotions will have no value.

He never discussed it with Bibha. Bibha would have been astonished to hear it. Though the son is not with the parents, it is not that he did not or does not do anything for them. In this regard, there is no complaint about Aban. She might not have thought that her son would study abroad and stay back with a job. Could he or Bibha ever imagine that under the care of this very son they would make a tour of Europe and America three times? If they wanted, they could stay with him. Aban made a proposal too. But they won't be able to adapt themselves to the lifestyle abroad. So they did not agree.

It was at that time that Aban took the other decisions. Their rented house at Shantiniketan was for sale; he purchased and renovated it for his parents. He wanted to buy a flat in Kolkata too. But for Shaktibrata he would have bought are have bought one.

The point was raised even a few days ago. Aban was coming to India for a day or two. In spite of his busy schedule he would make time to

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visit his parents at Shantiniketan. When Bibha learned this she said, "If we visit his part in Kolkata, he could have stayed full time with us. The train had a shelf lourney takes six to seven hours. And there is the exhaustion. If the flat were bought then!"

As Shaktibrata heard her talk like that at that moment, she did not appear to be ailing. Nor did it seem that she talked less nowadays and was appear to appear and more reticent day by day. After hearing from Aban over the phone that he was coming, she has suddenly regained her vitality.

Experience has taught Shaktibrata to digest everything. Suppressing a smile he said, "To buy a flat in Kolkata for ten to twelve lakh rupees, only to get our son for about ten hours with us! For one tenth of such an expenditure we both, the old man and old woman, could have made a tour to Washington; couldn't we?"

Perhaps Bibha could not guess that Shaktibrata would say this. A little silence, and then she said, "I didn't mean that. But if we had a flat, he might feel more attracted to the idea of coming home from time to time. Can a father-in-law's house be an honourable shelter?"

"Are you off your head?" Shaktibrata uttered indifferently. It sounded a little sad when he muttered slowly, "Do you think that the one whom even his old parents cannot attract - one who cannot find time to visit them even once in three years - would take an interest in a flat in Kolkata.

Bibha did not reply. Silently, she got back to her own self.

Now, at this moment, as he remembers that day, Shaktibrata feels a bit sad. Perhaps he was wrong, he thought. How could he know that Bibha was not right? He can now feel that filial company cannot be measured by money. A parent experiences the pull of relationship, its depth and pain more intensely even when the child is away. If he himself thinks selfishly, why shouldn't Aban's mother?

The newspaper is spread in front of him but he has no mind to read. The kitchen at a distance gives off the pleasant smell of cooking shukto2. Inhaling that smell, Shaktibrata can feel his emotions. With that smell has mixed the smell of Bibha's existence—the smell of her motherliness, the smell of her sweat. It is time for the train to start. Does Aban get the

Shaktibrata stood up. Walking slowly upto the kitchen and seeing Bibha's grand arrangement all around, he said, "You're doing everything by yourself, I see! Where's the maid?"

Posing to cover her head with her sari's end, Bibha asked, "Why? Want to have tea?"

Dibyendu Palit / 19

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². A vegetable preparation with bitter gourd.

"Wait a bit. Let me finish the shukto"

"Wait a bit. Let me mile on a side of her aging face Bibha said, "Pre Made pavesh3. She'll bring megaally was "Pre With a flash of since of state of the market. Made payesh³. She'll bring rosogolla. When you to bring barhis⁴ for feet. went to the market I forgot to ask you to bring barhis4 for frying"

"But I brought what you asked me to bring, didn't I?" said Shaktibray "How often do I go to the market now-a-days? You manage with the "How orten up I go with the things you get for domestic purchase. I've forgotten the current market

"But I see you remember the things you should remember. I forgot that Aban loves pabda⁵. You've bought mourald⁶ also." Bibha put off the shukto from the oven and turned off the gas knob. She stood pressing her waist as if she was feeling pain, and asked, "What's the time?"

"It's about ten, you know."

"I'm sure Aban is in the train now." Getting out of the kitchen, Bibha said, "Feeling heaviness in the waist. Let me get rid of it. Then I'll make tea for you."

Shaktibrata looked thoughtful.

"Why did you make arrangements on such a grand scale? How much will he eat? It would have been quite necessary if he stayed for two days at least."

"May be. But how can I cook only the usual course of dal, rice and curry?" Staring at the sky Bibha said, "I'll arrange as many plates as I can Let him choose. Today is a special day. He's coming after a long time, isn't he? I have invited Shyamali too. She'll dine here with her son. What special dinner can they afford to have at home? She often asks, 'When will Dada' come?' "

Seeing Bibha move towards the bathroom, Shaktibrata came back to the verandah and sat in the easy chair. The sun has started receding, and the neem tree has cast its shade in the courtyard. The quivering of the shade proves that a breeze is blowing. There's no reason, yet he feels a sigh come up his throat. Before it gets long, Shaktibrata checks himself. Deeply absorbed in thought, he has been looking morose since morning. He is advanced in age and has gathered so much experience; yet, what he is thinking now has no connexion either with the present or with the future. Is there any logic for feeling sad, thinking about what might be but what

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a sweet dish, Bengali style. 3.

dried balls of paste of dal. 4.

a type of fish.

a kind of small fish. 6.

respectful reference to Aban

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actually did not happen? Or, does man think like this because this is how

May be, or may be not. But Bibha gives the impression that she is life is? not at all worried about what might happen in the past or what might be not at all Aban is coming after a long time. He has asked his mother in the future. The truth in this result is to cook for him. The truth in this possibility is everything to her at this moment. She is not concerned with anything else.

The telephone rings. Shaktibrata cannot guess who the caller is. He looks around. And realizing that Bibha was still in the toilet, he hastens to the bed room, and quickly picks up the phone.

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"Aban? Where are you calling from?"

"From Kolkata"

"Why from Kolkata? Is the train delayed?"

"No. It isn't. Aban stopped a while, and then said, "Extremely sorry, Daddy. I won't be able to come."

"How's that?—But why? Your Mom—"

"I know, I won't be able to face Mom. I feel miserable!"

"But—" Shaktibrata's voice trembles now, "Why Aban? What's the matter?"

"Because of some change in the flight schedule I am to fly to Singapore this evening. Won't be able to find time."

Before he could say anything else, Shaktibrata noticed that Bibha was standing in the middle of the room. Then he continued, "Will you speak to your Mom?"

"No", said Aban, "I didn't think that this would happen, Daddy. I'll speak to her from Singapore. I'm trying to get a break before returning."

"Aban—"

"Tell her not to be upset."

"Bye, then. See you soon. Keep fine."

Long ago when he used to read story books, some people would be stunned by such sudden news. Shaktibrata did not know if Bibha felt the that. He put down the receiver and said, "It was Aban. Has to take the evening flight. Can't come."

Bibha listened as she should. Then, to sit, she moved to wards the cot. Astonished, Shaktibrata remarked, "The World Bank, will findsh him." "Ah! Why are you talking like this? Think of our sons problems. It's hat counts." luck that counts." Hardwar

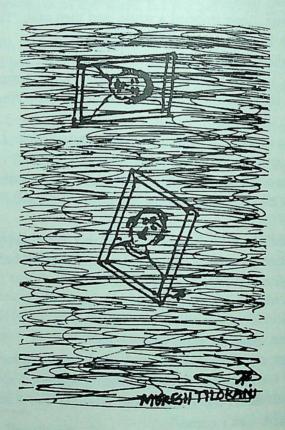
Dibyendu Palit / 21

"He'll speak to you from Singapore. Will try to take a break before he returns to the States".

Bibha did not respond.

Shaktibrata noticed that putting off her glasses Bibha was wiping her eyes with an end of her sari. He knows that she will thus return gradually to her world of silence. And then to her usual activity. Where will then Aban

Translated from Bengali by Anil Kumar Ray



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Stand Back, Please, It's the Nobel!

Nabaneeta Dev Sen

Ai dil hai mushkil jeena yahan Zara hatke zara bachke Yeh hai Nobel, Meri Jaan!

Look There!

"Hey look! That's Nabaneeta Dev Sen! Know who that is? You don't? She's Amartya Sen's first wife!" Both boys turned to look. The Paanwala too. And the person drinking Coke lowered his bottle. The boys bought their cigarettes with their faces turned in my direction—towards Chintamani's shop. As a result, I did not manage to buy the pack of bindis. I started moving away quickly. Ears burning. No sooner had I got to the stall selling kurtas—

"Didi, namaskar!"

I didn't know her. She was carrying a packet under her arm.

"Saw you on TV. Giving an interview. About his Nobel prize. Really, we are all so proud!"

"Of course!"

k before

iping her gradually

ien Aban

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"I'm so happy! A great honour for a Bengali!"

"Yes, of course," I attempted to push through the crowd trying to smile sweetly. But this is Rashbehari Avenue, in Gariahat, Kolkata—it's impossible to make any headway. A bald-headed man dressed in dhoti-kurta—

^{1.} Popular Hindi song from the film CID (1956). The original song literally translates as "Dear heart, it's a tough job to survive in these parts/ watch out! and stand back, this is Bombay, my love!" The author changes Bombay' to 'Nobel'.

"Namaskar-Nabaneeta Devi, is it not?"

"Yes" (with a smile)....

"Yes" (with a string)....
"We used to read your writings and all, but now we know you as "We used to read you as something greater. The wife of such a great man! A thousand congratu." lations! The pride of our country!"

"I'm not his wife. I used to be."

"It's all the same to us. Bengal's pride and honour!"

- Smile!

"I really liked the TV programme."

- Smile!

"What are you writing now? You must write about him,"

"Yes-I've been thinking....I must go now."

You're a Celebrity Too? How Sad!

Shentu-da raised a hue and cry when we met at a wedding the other day.

"Who is this? Goodness! Nabaneeta, isn't it? Yes? So you did find the time to come! You've become so famous these days. What media coverage! Massive publicity for both of you-you, on the one hand, and Amita-di on the other. You're both such favourites with the media-you're there when I switch on the radio, or the TV, or when I read the papers! Ha, ha, ha!"

I laughed too.

Sorry, Shentu-da, I have been a bit of a favourite with the media for a while now-this small, harmless sentence hummed inside my head, but didn't erupt.

His wife hastened to my rescue.

"Look how you talk! As if Nabaneeta has only just become famous! Everyone knew her as her parents' daughter from the time she was a baby!"

Ha! What a defence! As if I couldn't have become famous on my own! Given recognition because of my father or because of the father of my girls! Hadn't I been writing all these days—couldn't I have had a little bit of 'fame' on that account? But this debate just whirled round inside my head. I tried to look composed and pretended to smile. Meanwhile my blood boiled.

"The unblinking lights flash on my soul," like a laser beam. So many eyes all around, no shield to hide behind! And no seemliness. Here I am at a wedding and at a wedding and getting as much attention as the bride and the groom!

As though I have a As though I have done Bengalis proud! When it started, I hadn't really

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minded. Now I found it stifling. The improbable had suddenly become the real. And here I was cast in the role of a mirror. Reflecting an absence. I had no shape to call my own.

But in actual fact, it was wonderful. I was thrilled—how many Bengali mothers have seen their daughters' father win the Nobel Prize? Not even

But the Tandava of exultation had addled people's brains. The joy one! had become unbearable!

Silver Carp

"Didi! These days, you're... eh...", he finished his sentence with a meaningful quiver of his eyebrows. He had a shopping bag in his hand—the stalks of the vegetables peeping out. A striped shirt and snuff-coloured trousers. Did I know him? Did I? I didn't. I'm surrounded by too many people nowadays.

"You're seen on TV so often nowadays." Smile.

"Of course, especially after Sir won the Nobel Prize! Pictures everywhere. Everyone knows you now. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha."

"What an honour!"

"Sir has spread the glory of Bengal, I mean, Bengalis, I mean West Bengal-to the whole world." True. After Tagore, it's Amartya Sen.

"Had you gone to market?"

"That's right—just to Gariahat..."

"What fish did you buy?"

"Fish? There was good Hilsa—but it was so expensive! I bought Silver Carp. Fresh fish—just forty rupees or so. And it was alive. It was swimming about in water."

"Silver Carp? No! It's not a fish we care for."

"Why not? It's really tasty! You can make a Kofta, or make cutlets."

"Does Sir eat Silver Carp?"

"I don't really know. These new varieties hadn't hit the market at that time!"

Senior, Junior

"Just give me a packet of Goodricke tea. Two hundred and fifty grams." "Namaskar, boudi. How are you?" "Good. And you?"

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 25

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Digitized by Arya Samaj rounders, on TV. Have your daughters left? I saw them too."

"Yes-they left long back."

"Your son-in-law is nice."

"Yes." Smile.

"Ouite attached to his father-in-law, isn't he?"

"Really? I wouldn't say that! Who told you?" No smile,

"I saw a picture in the papers. In Shantiniketan."

"But that was a group photo. There were so many family members there. How could you make out?"

"But how come I didn't see you in it?"

"Were you supposed to?"

"Well, I just wondered. One feels like seeing you, isn't it? I just asked because I didn't. But neither did I see a single picture of you and dada."

"Give me a packet of Cream Cracker biscuits too. Hurry up!"

"I saw a picture of dada, with the son smiling on one side, daughter on the other. I never saw the boy around here."

"That's because he lives abroad."

"Is the boy not yours?"

"No."

"So why didn't his mother visit?"

"Because she's in heaven. Now hurry up!...Now what's this? I wanted Cream Cracker—not Krack Jack!"

"Sorry, boudi! Here, let me change it!-Here you are! But tell me, who came first?"

"What do you mean? Give me the change—I have to go."

"Fifty-five, sixty, two hundred. I mean who was the first? Which of you is senior? You or her?"

"I don't see why you need to know about first or second, senior or junior By the way, this five-rupee note is really coming apart! But don't bother. I have to go now."

"Hope you didn't mind, boudi? I'm, sorry. Very, very sorry. You don't really mind, do you?"

Covering Up

"Here you are Nabaneeta! Going to Shantiniketan, are you? To Amita-di?" "No. A friend of mine was going to Shantiniketan, I just came along to the station."

"Is Amita-di well now? What a hassle it has been!"

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"Yes, it's been a real strain." "Managing such a great event all by herself, and at her age too! To be surrounded by strangers twenty-four hours a day! People from newsbe surrounded the police can de day: reopie from news-papers, from television bothering her, taking pictures, interviewing her. papers, a limit to what the police can do to stop them:" "True. But it was a joyous occasion too!"

"Goes without saying! The mother of such a precious gem! She's the source of it all! Could the son have achieved so much had his mother not been so distinguished? Daughter of Kshitimohan Sen – her wisdom, her learning, and intelligence – she infused her son with all of it! But for a mother like that..."

"Amartya's father was a reputed scientist, Dr A.T. Sen, he..."

"I know. I know. He had interviewed me when he was in the UPSC _I didn't get that job. He's so unfortunate—didn't survive to witness his son's glory. At least, his mother's still living. But it's a rare thing to see a son so devoted to his mother. Look how often he rushes here to see his mother! That's why there's so much being written about his mother. Of course, they're also writing about you. Pictures - ha, ha, ha - and interviews. Yes! Lots of them. So many people being interviewed nowadays. Every Tom, Dick and Harry has become an Amartya-specialist. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha."

"Your daughters had come with their father, hadn't they? Lovely girls! Do they live with their father?"

"No. They've grown up now. They live independently."

"One has to be very lucky to have a father like this! Do you get it? Your daughters are lucky. You know that, don't you?"

"I know."

"He'd taken the girls to Sweden. Wanted to take his mother and sister. They weren't able to go finally. They had to cancel their tickets at the last minute. How come you didn't go?"

"Where should I have gone?"

"To Sweden."

"To Sweden! Why?"

"Just like that! I mean —your daughters went. That's why I mentioned it."

"But it's different for them."

"We'd all hoped that you'd go too. You keep going abroad for no teason at all, and you didn't go this time. You could have gone and joined the celebrations."

"What do you mean I go abroad for no reason at all? I go on work,

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 27

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"This was work too! It looked unseemly"

"What did?"

"You're not joining them out of resentment. Looked improper I "You're not joining the state of the prize" believe the entire village had gone with Saramago when he won the prize." "What do you mean by that? Who was resentful? As if I was invited"

"Of course. They didn't go uninvited."

"Who paid for their tickets? The Nobel Committee, or their father." "How do I know? I didn't. Their father did, probably."

"We thought it was the Nobel Committee."

"Perhaps. I don't know."

"Since you didn't join them on this happy occasion—it looked as though you weren't really happy."

"What can I do about that?"

"It's quite clear that you don't care for what people think. We could guess from the way you were drinking in front of the TV cameras! Even men don't drink or smoke pot like that in front of the camera!"

"Who was drinking and smoking pot?"

"You, of course! Drinking champagne. On the 10th—there you were sitting on the bed with a group of elderly Bengali women. And you happily opened a bottle-we saw it on TV!"

"Oh that! Really, Somen-da, how many times do I have to tell you people—that wasn't alcohol. It was fizzy fruit juice. Enough of that!"

"That's what they all say! We know what kind of fruit juice that was!"

"Just the other day someone like you asked me the same question in front of a minister at a seminar at Siliguri. It was an important seminar on 'Media and Modernity'-suddenly a question from the audience-"Why did you have to drink alcohol in front of the TV camera? Did you really need to do that?" My private life has become a public affair. Anybody can say anything about it! And I have to listen."

"But really, why did you drink? I too wondered about it."

(Barking) "I'm telling you, I didn't! It's called Ambrosia—it's a drink made from Peaches. Ambrosia—Immortal Nectar'. Because the name is 50 similar in meaning to Amartya's² I decided to have some fun with my cousing and Amartya's younger sister that day. That was Baby Champ - fakechampagne – for children, how many times do I have to say that? My cousin, or Buddu don't drink at all. Why criticize them for no reason at all?"

"That's what they all say! All women drink nowadays. But why not

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The reference is to the similarity between 'Ambrosia' ('Amrita') and 'Amartya' which means 'immore all' which means 'immortal'.

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drink behind closed doors, eh? Nobody's going to check! You needn't do it openly—on Television! It's just not done!"

"But forget it! If you've had a drink, you've had a drink. What's done, can't be undone. So why try to cover up now? Don't even try! Let it be. And there's something else I had to tell you. Do tell Amita-di that I have tried meeting her five times. Each time the security guards chased me away. Finally, I wrote to her. I don't know if she got the letter."

"Too many letters have been coming to Pratichi.3 In fact, loads of

"But no matter how many kilos of letters arrive, I know Amita-di will reply to my letter—that's a fact! You hardly know the kind of relationship we have. We go back a long way."

"Then why worry?"

"Just hurry her up a bit. Remind her. But don't refer to me as 'Somenda'. She won't know the name—say, 'Reply to Sumu'..."

"Alright."

"So, what will you tell her?"

"Reply to Sumu."

"Correct! Thank you!"

"But, Somen-da, I am not going to Shantiniketan now."

Reply, Reply!

"Didi, didi!" The middle-aged gentleman panted as he ran, and blocked my path. His beard and hair quite grey. I am never punctual, I arrive late everywhere. And at this point too—I was racing. It's always extremely inconvenient if somebody stops me at such times. I gritted my teeth and stopped. I was inside the Nandan complex—for a meeting at the Bangla Academy. Undoubtedly, it had started already.

"I've been running after you for a long time!"

"Why? Is there anything in particular you want?"

"Yes! Dada's address!"

"Dada! Which dada?"

"I mean—Amartya Sen."

"Oh—that dada. Why do you need his address?"

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 29

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'Amartya'

^{3.} The name of Amartya Sen's parent's house in Shantiniketan.

"I'll write to him. Congratulating him."

"Trinity College, Cambridge, England."

"That's all? No name of street? House number? Pincode?"

"That's all INO hand." I said as I broke into a run. "None!"

"Is that the complete address? Thank you, didi..."

"Didi! Didi! Please, please—one more thing."

"Now what?" I gritted my teeth and stopped.

"Do you think he'll reply? Does he write back?"

"He does normally. But now with thousands of greetings, I don't know how much he manages."

"Do you think grandma will reply?"

"Grandma?"

"Do you think Grandma will reply? If I write to her? I mean, dada's mother who lives in Pratichi! Won't I get an answer if I write to her?" How could a dada's mother be a grandma!4

"It's all so chaotic now..." I said breaking into a run, "She's very busy. She's unwell too. Where's the need to write to her?"

"Didi! Please listen! One last time!"

"Will you reply? Will you? I mean, if they don't have the time, what can I do? Could I write to you? At Bhalobasha at Hindustan Park? It'll do if you reply."

"Why me?"

"Just a congratulations! For dada. You will reply, won't you? I just want a reply, didi, from anyone among you. Antara, Nandana – anyone – pleasel I shall preserve it—as a memento of the Nobel Prize. As a family heirloom. Just a reply."

"Not me. I always lose letters. I shall lose yours."

"What do you mean? In that case...."

"It's a real problem!"

A Simple Task

I was busy trying to finish a piece of writing in a great rush when Kanai came in.

"Didi, a friend of Jamai-babu's is here to meet you."

The mother of a person who one addresses as dada, or an elder brother, would be like an aunt

Literally, 'Brother-in-law', a form of address used for one's sister's husband.

Kanai, a servent in the contract of the contr 5. Kanai, a servant in the house would use the same form of address.

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autogra son - r "What's his name?"

"He says you won't know him. And it's very urgent."

I had to get up, abandoning the writing.

"Namaskar. I'm from Batanagar. I used to study with Bablu at St Gregory's in Dhaka. Bablu used to be a close friend."

These days, I have not come across too many people who were not dose friends with Amartya at some point. Of late, very few address him Amartya'; he is either 'Bablu' or 'Bablu-da' to everybody. His mother is 'Amita-di' or 'Amita-mashi' to all and sundry. And yet, for the last forty vears or so, I have not seen this crowd anywhere near them at all. Intimacy had sprouted suddenly like a magic beanstalk. I had no idea what kind of expression surfaced on my face. But no words did. Had I abandoned my writing for this?

"I want a 'darshan' of Amita-mashi."

"She's in Shantiniketan."

"Her address?"

"Pratichi, Shantiniketan."

"Would I need an appointment?"

"That would help."

"Alright. Just get me an appointment with her. Let me give you my phone number. You can tell me once you've got a date and time from her. Remember, I'm busy through the week. I have time only in the weekends."

The gentleman took out a small note pad from his pocket and started scribbling something. Once he'd finished, he thrust it towards me.

"Once you know when and where she'd be able to meet me, just call me at this number. I'll buy tickets for Shantiniketan accordingly."

I suddenly woke up.

"Are you telling me to make a long distance call to Shantiniketan and fix you an appointment? I'm sorry, I can't do that. You'll have to do it yourself. Here, take down the telephone number."

"But she wouldn't know me. Why should she give me an appoint-

ment. It would be good to go through you...."

"Look, I don't know you either. But you have come to my house, haven't you? Go to her in the same way. Just tell me one thing, why do you want to go to Shantiniketan?"

"I want to touch her feet. And take her autograph. In fact, both their autographs."

Suddenly, a halogen bulb lit his face up.

"I say, there's one thing that's easily done! Suppose, I leave the autograph book with you. You can get their autographs – of mother and son - tight? Then you can give me a call and I can collect it when I find

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 31

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er, would husband.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation. Simple task! Just tell me, when

"But what about touching her feet?"

"I'll do that later-in future, some time."

What a Lovely Morning!

A wintry morning. The roads, clear of traffic but not of people. Hordes of humans speeding towards the Lakes. Each one giving me a sidelong glance as they pass. On the first floor balcony of a two-storied house, a nighty-clad woman jumped out of her skin on seeing me as if she'd seen a ghost and ran inside. What could the matter be? I turned to look at the balcony as I passed—she had summoned a shawl-wrapped sleepy gentleman; they were both gaping at me. This has happened before. Even a few days ago, I used to be really thrilled, I used to think they are looking at me-Nabaneeta'! And tingle with delight. Now, I shuddered in dread. They must be looking at the first wife of the Nobel Laureate.

["She shared house with such a great man for sixteen-seventeen years Too bad she never managed to make it last!"]

Two girls passed by. Brushing against me. They kept turning back to look. What were they looking at? Had I not combed my hair? Had I forgotten my bindi? One can hardly get dressed before a morning walk Why were the girls staring? Should I escape into the gully to my right?

"Namaskar-didi." They now faced me.

"Namaskar".

"We are...I mean, you don't know us. But we know you."

I flashed a smile at that because I know the sentence that invariably followed such a preamble. They were going to say, "We love to read what you write." I stopped quite happily. This was the real reward for a writer. the love of her readers. I valued such pronouncements exceedingly. What a lovely morning it was turning out to be!

The girls said, "We know you. We've seen you on Television. And read your interviews in the papers. We are both students of Economics We are really devoted to Sir. We thought we'd talk to you when we sported you."

N: "But of course!"

A, B: "He's such a great man – we'd never be able to approach him - so we want to convey our congratulations to you—our best wishes and respects." respects."

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roach him vishes and The girls dived swiftly down to touch my feet; 'let it be' I responded

A: "Neither of your daughters studied Economics, did they?" quickly.

N: "No".

B: "One is Nandana—a film star. I saw Gudiya on TV. She looks a

bit like you."

A: "The other one looks like her father, doesn't she? I saw her picture in the papers—with her father. Antara is a journalist, isn't she?"

B: "Her husband is a journalist too, isn't he? Pratik. He wasn't a student

of Economics either, was he?"

N: "He studied English too. You seem to know all of them!"

A: "And you have asthma, don't you? Is that why you're taking a morning walk?"

N: "You know that too?"

A, B: "We know everything about you!"

N: "My goodness! Very good. Do you come walking every day?"

A, B: "We've just started."

N: "It's a good habit. Keep it up!"

I had just about taken two steps when two gorgeous-looking middleaged women attired in attractive salwar-kameez suits, stopped in front of me, beaming; and, taking up every inch of pathway.

A: "Aren't you Nabaneeta Dev Sen?"

N: "Yes."

B: "Are you going for a walk?"

N: "Yes."

A: "We're just coming back."

N: "I can see that."

B: "Haven't seen you here before."

N: "Well, I have only just started."

A: "Because of your asthma? Or arthritis? You have both, don't you? I read about it in your writings."

B: "You are seen everywhere nowadays. On TV. Newspapers. Everyone knows you now. Like we do! He, he, he..."

A: "What do you mean? Didn't you know her earlier?"

B: "Earlier? You mean, even before the Nobel Prize?"

A: "How strange—what has the Nobel Prize got to do with her?"

B: "Come on! She was married to such a great man for so many years—that's why she's so famous in the media..."

A: 'What nonsense! I am a fan of her writing. That's the reason I stopped her. You were the one who pointed out that Nabaneeta Dev Sen was coming this way."

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B: "I said that because I had Amartya Sen in mind."

B: "I said that because N: "You are both tired—do go home. I'll just carry on with my walk".

N: "You are both the A: "Please don't mind, not everyone reads you know. But I stopped because of you...."

se of you....
B: "Why? What's wrong with being known for your husband's achieve. ments?"

N: "Which route do you take for your walk?"

A, B: "We don't really walk; we're members of the Laughing Club, We also exercise."

A: "It would do you good if you joined the Laughing Club. A sure cure for asthma and arthritis."

N: "I've heard of the Laughing Club and heard a lot of laughter too-from outside. I never dared go inside...."

A: "You must come. It cures everything. You'll be fit."

B: "And everyone will be so pleased to have you—they all know

N: "I need to think about it. Let it be, now. We'll talk about it another day."

Mass Communication Centre

1

"Speaking. Yes?"

"Didi, could you give me Amartya Sen's fax number at Cambridge."

"Why do you need it?"

"The minister wants to send an urgent message...."

"Alright. Just take it down: 0044...."

"Thank you, didi."

"Welcome. But Amartya isn't in Cambridge right now. He's in Boston."

"Oh, I see. When will he get back?"

"I wouldn't know that."

"Is there a fax number"

"Yes. Take it down, 001..."

"Thank you, didi! Thanks. Many thanks!"

2

"Speaking."

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"Didi, what is Amartya-da's phone number in Boston? Is it the same

as the fax number?" "No, it's different. Here it is...."

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"Thank you, didi. I'm really bothering you."

"Never mind. Doesn't matter."

3

"Yes, speaking. Yes?"

"Well, Nabaneeta-di, do you think you'll be able to tell me Babluda's actual place of birth. I need this information for a book. The papers in Bangladesh say he was born in Dhaka, papers here say Shantiniketan. I've also heard it said that he was born in Calcutta—in his mother's maternal uncle's place. Today I was told that he was born in Rangoon when his father worked there. Either he, or his younger sister, Supurna..."

"Amartya was born in Gurupally, at Kshitimohan Sen's house. Neither

he, nor his sister, was born in Burma."

"Is that so? What a relief, Nabaneeta-di! There was such confusion...."

"Why get confused? You could have asked his mother."

"Poor Amita-di-I don't want to bother her. What a hassle it has been for her. And besides, it's hard to get through to Shantiniketan."

"And it's easier to get through to me. And it doesn't matter if you bother me..."

"Of course not! You are so close to us—our very own! We do have a right to bother you, don't we? Then his place of birth is Gurupally, Shantiniketan, 3rd November 1933—isn't it? Alright then, that's all for now."

"Hello Nabaneeta-di? Sorry to bother you. Actually we are making a card for Amartya-da, and we need to know his blood group. It's going to be on the card. What's his blood group? Do you remember?"

"Amartya's Blood group! My goodness! It's been a long time. Almost the story of another lifetime. When we had our first baby, we had our blood groups tested at Cambridge. There were no problems, so I didn't teally pay much attention to it. I can't remember my own blood group, how can I remember Amartya's? What do you think I am? Blood group, huh!"

"Who do you think will be able to tell us? Supurna-di?" "She's in America. But I don't think she'd know even if she were

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri "Where is Amartya-da now?"

"Where is Amazy." "Where is Amazy." "I don't really know. He's gone to deliver a lecture somewhere,"

"Would Annia-cu Mis wife in Cambridge and "I wouldn't know. Why don't you call his wife in Cambridge and ask her? Perhaps, she'd know."

"Would it be right to bother her?"

"Was it right to bother me?"

"How can you say that, Nabaneeta-di? Are you getting hassled? I am like a younger brother to you—I have a small claim, don't I?"

"Hello. Hope it isn't too late to call. Tell me Nabaneeta-di, did Amartya-da return to Trinity College when he left Jadavpur, or did he go to Oxford, or London School of Economics?"

"Trinity. LSE was later-in 1971. And he went from there to Oxford much later."

"And what about Harvard?"

"He went there twice. In 1968 for the first time. After that he was there from 1987. Why don't you look at his Bio-Data? Who's Who would have it all."

"Just this little bit of information. Some say he was in Stanford, some say he was in Berkeley. Which is correct?"

"In Stanford in 1961. In Berkeley in 1964. Listen, it's best that you look up the International Who's Who. This isn't the way to go about it"

Entertaining the Son-in-Law

"Khuku,6 Amartya is coming to Calcutta, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

"We want to invite him for a meal one day. Could you make the arrangements? You come with the girls too."

"No, Milu-mashi, don't invite him for a meal. He won't have the

time."

"That's why I'm telling you in advance." "And why do you want to invite him anyway? All these years he has

come so often to Calcutta—you never asked him!" "Amartya married again, after you split up. How can one invite a son-in

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^{6.} Literally, 'little girl'. In this case, Nabaneeta's pet name.

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a son-in-law under such circumstances. You tell me? One hardly feels like." "But the situation hasn't changed now, has it? Why do you want to invite him? Why this sudden desire?"

"Whatever it is, he has won such honour! He was our son-in-law in

the past." "He was, but he no longer is, is he? Why don't you rejoice by yourselves? No need to lay claims on his honour."

"You really are so harsh these days."

"Not harsh. Just truthful. Be practical."

The Stupefied In-laws

"My goodness! Phul-kaka, Ranga-kaka! Do come in! How smartly dressed you are! Kurtas pressed, dhotis pleated, complete with a chadar! On your way back after a Shraddha, are you?"

"No, we came to visit you."

"How wonderful! But what's the matter? You're visiting after a long time."

"You must never ask 'what's the matter' when relatives from your father's side come visiting! We came just like that. Get us some tea."

"I'm so sorry! What is it? Is somebody getting married? An invitation -yes?"

"No-not that."

The two dignified, handsome old men exchanged a look. It looked like they were in a bit of a spot. Then Phul-kaka cleared his throat and shifted around in his seat.

"Ever since we heard the news about the Prize, we've been meaning to visit you."

"That's very nice. But why are you looking so grim? Why this hesitation?"

"To be honest with you, Khuku, I don't know if we should be thrilled or break our hearts. We're going through both!"

Now Ranga-kaka cleared his throat.

"Suppose it was all like before, can you imagine the state you and Our whole family would be in? I can't even imagine the extent of that tremendous elation. And now? I see pictures of our son-in-law on Tele-

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 37

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^{7.} The Bangla word, "Jamai, literally, "son-in-law is a generic term used for the husband of any daughter of the house. In this case, Nabaneeta's aunt is referring to Nabaneeta's ex-husband as a "son-in-law".

vision, in the papers, and it pierces my heart. I remember the good old vision, in the papers, and to provide days—the news of your engagement, how we all went to Shantiniketan for days—the news of your engages the reception—and how hard he'd worked during your father's Shraddha."

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"And that other time, at your place in London..."

"Just forget all those things! Don't remember them at all—that old "Just forget an those that old album is cancelled! Only if you stop regretting the good old days will you be able to enjoy the present moment...."

"What're you saying? Why shouldn't we regret it? Do you know your aunt burst into tears when she saw a picture of him with his smiling wife

in the papers?"

"Please, all of you must make yourselves feel better - the whole world is happy - why should our family be sad? How can that be a good thing? Cheer up! You'll be cheating yourselves if you remain glum."

"We should cheer up? Good. That's wonderful! Are you telling us

that we should be happy about the Nobel Prize?"

"Of course! Will you brood about me and be glum when the whole country is rejoicing?"

"If your parents were living—they'd be so broken-hearted."

"Who knows? We can't be so sure about that. Here I am feeling happy!"

"We can see that."

"Just a little harassed and flustered. People are really hassling me. People and phone-calls constantly. That's all. No time to call my own. My own work has gone to the dogs. I'm either taking phone-calls or meeting people in the drawing-room. My gruff voice has become croaky now Everyone's demanding sweets to celebrate, and I'm going broke trying to treat them—even though the winner of the Prize is no longer a member of this family!"

"Excuse me, Khuku—did you say that the winner isn't a member of your family? Isn't he Pico and Tumpa's father8? Don't talk like this. If you won't treat people to sweet on behalf of their father, who will?"

"This house has suddenly become Amartya Sen's in-law's place. People stare from the streets. There's no way I can stand out on the balcony. I can't wander about or happily stroll into shops. Within two minutes, someone or other will stop me and talk about Amartya. Every meeting, interview, letter has turned my life into an absurd play, Phul-kaka."

The phone started to ring.

"....Yes? Yes, I did. Thank you. Where do I have to send the pho-

The relatives use the pet names of the two girls, mentioned earlier as Antara and Nandana

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tographs? To Shantiniketan? Of course, I will. Yes, yes. Namaskar." "This is what goes on all the time. And I can't say 'No'."

"We'll have to go now. It was good to talk to you. I'm glad you're not crushed. The girls aren't here—so it's quite a strain on you."

"The girls will come for the civic reception."

"Will you go too?"

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"If they invite me, I will."

"If you go, will you get us a couple of invitation cards?"

"Of course! But will you come? Sure you won't feel sad? His wife will be there in person."

The Green Room

"Ma-dear, what will you wear? Have you thought about it?"

"Yes-the new red-bordered Gadawal."

"What? A red-bordered white saree? The uniform of a dutiful, Hindu wife? No, didi, you can't do that! Wear something colourful. A red-bordered saree is a horrible idea!"

"That's right. It won't do at all!" The girls jumped up. And piled the bed with sarees.

"The black kantha-saree?"

"Too dressy."

"The mauve Baluchari?"

"Same problem."

"The gray Pochampalli?"

"Will do."

"Yellow Bomkai?"

"Will do."

"Green Dhakai?"

"Will do."

"Red-bordered Dhakai?"

"Too much zari!"

"Green-bordered Dhakai?"

"Too drab."

"OK! Yellow Bomkai?"

"No matching blouse!"

"Green Dhakai?"

"No matching petticoat!"

"What then?"

Finally, after much thought, the girls selected Tumpa's maroon Batik

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 39

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silk with a black border. Because it was colourful, and simple and very dignified. And there was a matching black blouse. They had found a matching petticoat too. No further discussions. It was final.

"Girls! Have you decided what you'll wear?"

"Yes! Tumpa will wear your white Dhakai Benarasi, and I shall wear the red and white Gharchoulu—we both have matching red blouses,"

Just like the time when they were kids. They never felt they had decked up unless they had worn their mother's sarees! Although both have plenty of sarees and blouses of their own now—they had decided to abandon those. I was delighted, of course. So, the mother dressed in her younger daughter's maroon saree, and the daughters wore their mother's red and white sarees with zari-work.

"Ma, you need to pin your saree. Your saree always keeps slipping off. The TV cameras will be focussed on you constantly."

"Ma-dear, please, please wear a fresh bindi. Don't be a miser and wear an old one - it might just fall off - remember how it did at the Book Fair?"

"Didi, please don't take that shabby old sack-like bag! Don't know why you use just that one bag. If only you knew how silly it looks. Carrying fifty packets..."

"Tell me, am I being given a civic reception? What is this you've started? Rest assured, nobody will look at me today."

"Really? That would be the day! You don't know Bengalis - they'll all be gaping at you - twelve thousand of them!"

"Where is she? Where's Nabaneeta Dev Sen? Can you see her?" -"There she is - Amartya Sen's first wife - can you see? See, there she is - looks a bit crazy, saree raised high up to her knee, carrying three bags - that's her!' That's what they'll say!"

"Thanks. You go ahead. I'm not coming."

"Do you really believe it? We were just pulling your leg. Just teasing" "Actually, you're really smart, Ma! Nobody can make out from outside how dumb you actually are! You have a deceptive appearance."

"Twelve thousand people will be watching you, remember that—be aware of it all the time."

"Twelve thousand? That's just inside the auditorium. What about the TV? The whole of West Bengal will be watching. And didi, don't you start digging inside your nose to check if something suddenly went in—and mess things up!"

"What if she inclines her head to one side and begins to scratch her

"What do you think of me, eh? Am I a country bumpkin, or what? ear with a hairpin-in full view of the camera?"

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Haven't I ever been to a public function before? Listen, you idiots, I am a nobody today, all cameras will be focussed elsewhere."

"You don't have to feel thrilled because of that. Don't you see, didi, the gaze of the camera will have a gossip interest. Remember that! The wife, after all, is the wife. The ex-wife always reeks much more of gossip!"

The advice of youth shrivelled the joy of participation. Finally, the whole gang was ready to go to Taj Bengal. Pico, Tumpa, Pratik, Kabir were all ready. So was my mother-in-law. She suddenly clasped my hand tightly, "You come with me. They have put me in a separate convoy. The children will go with their father. Who will come with me? I don't want to go on my own. You come with me."

Alright! This was a good arrangement for me. I was going because they had affectionately invited me but I was feeling slightly uncomfortable to go with the main convoy. But then, I am a mother-in-law too! So I quickly grabbed my son-in-law's hand, "You come with me. I don't want to go on my own."

Thus we started - three generations - each accompanying the motherin-law. Righto! Speed up to Netaji Indoor Stadium!

Convoy

The pilot car went ahead, its siren shrieking. And the six white Ambassadors followed in a line. The three of us occupied the car in the middle along with a police officer. The other cars were full of security personnel.

The streets were festooned with crowds. Young and old. A doting crowd, awaiting a glimpse. Just like me. Me as a child, waiting to see Dhillon and Shahnawaz9. And some years later, to see Khruschev and Bulganin¹⁰. I had never imagined that people would wait the same way to see the father of my two girls!

The sound of the siren woke the worn out crowd. When 'mother's convoy' slowly entered the Netaji Indoor Stadium, I clearly saw excited crowds bend to catch a glimpse of the passengers through the windows; and look up in disappointment. There could be two reasons for their dissatisfaction. Either they hadn't been able to see anything through the dark

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 41

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^{9.} K.S. Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan were important members of the Indian National Army founded by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Shahnawaz Khan was Chief of General Staff. They were felicitated in a public ceremony in

^{10.} Nikita Khrushchev, premier of the USSR from 1958-1964 and Nikolai Bulganin, premier of USSR from 1955-1958. Both came on official visits to Calcutta.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri windows. Or, they saw fake, useless people—not the genuine person!

Unremitting melancholy clouded my mind. For the people. And for myself. I had become useless. Part of a false convoy. Far away, one could hear the siren of the real convoy. They were almost there!

Chit-chat

"We saw you the other day. Helping your mother-in-law to her place at the civic reception."

"Were you there?"

"No. Saw it on TV."

"My goodness - the place was a death-trap - she was just going to trip on some wires."

"But I can't tell you how poorly you came out! Have you given it any thought at all?"

"Poorly? Why?"

"Looked like you were buttering up your ex-mother-in-law."

"What do you mean? Shouldn't I hold her if she's about to have a fall?"

"You always do the wrong things. You should always keep the media response in mind."

"What did I do? What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that we were deeply embarrassed by your behaviour. What were you saying to Amartya's wife—so familiarly, and you were smiling away too? The papers said you were translating from Bangla to English."

"Exactly that! So the papers do write the truth sometimes. Good to

know that!"

vou?"

"Had the Government of West Bengal given you an interpreter's iob?"

"Why? What's wrong with that?"

"It really looked bad. Didn't you feel embarassed?"

"Why should I?"

"It looked as if you were sucking up to Amartya's wife!"

"Why should I have to do that? I knew her before they were married." "That woman was no less—why did she have to keep falling all over

"Really! You both behaved like characters on stage—sitting next to one another and exchanging pleasantries!"

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"So why are you angry about that?"

"Well, as a progressive woman you could have exercised some selfrestraint, couldn't you? Why did you have to go and sit right next to his wife?"

"Did I sit there of my own free will? All the places had names on

them!" "That explains! Thank God! We were all inferring wrongly. We thought you had voluntarily sat close to her! That's alright then - this was proper - a correct decision."

"That's enough! Enough of such ridiculous remarks! This is nonsense - it's wrong to sit there on my own - and it's alright if the Government makes me sit there. Don't annoy me! Let's talk about something else—is your daughter better now?"

"Yes, she is. My grand-daughter's fine too. By the way, I suddenly remembered, do you know what my daughter was saying-She said, 'Ma, does Nabaneeta-mashi have just one saree? She's been wearing the same saree in all the papers - Telegraph, Statesman, Asian Age - everywhere! Even in the magazine - Bhraman - she's wearing the same saree for the boat ride down the river. Do present her with a saree."

"Don't be silly! All the photographs were taken on the same day. I never got a chance to change out of the saree I wore for the boat ride from Gadiyari in the morning. The media had surrounded me with a great roar! It all began with Aajkal at Gadiyari. When I came back, Kanai presented me with a long list-from morning to evening there'd been two hundred and forty-three phone-calls, and twenty-five visitors. And everyone was there—PTI, UNI, BBC, Zee TV, Internet, Aajtak, Star TV, Doordarshan, Akashvani—all of them! All the newspapers and individual well-wishers, besides. Many of the media persons came back for another round. And I never had a chance to change out of that saree till the next morning. I was so tired that night that I went to bed wearing it! My daily routine was totally disrupted for a few days. There was total chaos at home—and no sense of privacy. Here I was—a person who struggled, wrote, and made a small place for herself in the heart of the Bengalis. But a tidal wave named Alfred Nobel had wiped it all out! Back to square one!"

Stand Back, Please, it's the Nobel!

Retrirring! Retrirring! "Who's that? Ringing the bell so loudly!" "It's the police, didi." Said a terrified Kanai.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 43

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Digitized by Arya Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
"Police? Why? What's the matter?" I walked out into the balcony like "Police? Why: White a defiant Amazon. The policeman looked up at me from the street arms

"Move this car. Is this Maruti yours?"

"Yes. Why should I move it?"

"Amartya Sen is visiting this house at five this evening."

"So? Why do I have to move the car?"

"Security!"

"Look! My car is always parked in front of my house. That's where it will remain. You can move it if you can!"

Surmising that I hadn't heard him, the policeman announced in a thundering voice to the entire neighbourhood:

"This evening at five Amartya Sen is coming to this house. The roads must be cleared. Move your car. Security!"

It was three in the afternoon, Amartya had said that he would drop by with Emma at around six. He was totally crushed by the lashings of the Nobel-wave, and he wasn't going to visit anyone else or pay social visits He wanted to spend the evening with the family. Therefore, I'd been forbidden to announce his visit. But this policeman had a microphone in his larvnx. One had to stop him.

"Alright, let's see what I can do. You carry on."

At around four, Shibu arrived, "Didi, Gariahat crossing is swarming with people. I believe Jamai-babu is coming at 5.00? There are people on the rooftops, and the balconies. What a crowd!"

"That's terrible, Shibu!"

"That's just what I saw."

The next morning one phone-call followed another.

"Khuku, you didn't even send word that Amartya and all were visiting!"

"Boudi, you never told us that Bablu-da and his wife would be visiting!"

"Minu-ma, why couldn't you tell us?"

"Was this fair, Nabaneeta? You didn't even tell me that Amartya would visit?"

"How did you get to know?"

"We saw a picture in the papers."

"What did you see in the papers?"

"Amartya Sen and his wife leaving Bhalobasha accompanied by his three children-after dinner."

"How did they find all that out?"

"Who knows?"

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Tumpa gave a shout, "The police have leaked the news, Ma! I think they raised the slogan 'Amartya Sen is coming, clear the streets' from Gariahat itself."

And Pico said in a matching accent, "But that's routine. Journalists always ask the police their programme for the day—"Where do you have always and then get to know their movements. The Press follow them. They go to the same places on duty."

"Thank goodness the reporters didn't dash into the house!"

"How could they? The house was surrounded by the police. You didn't step out—so you don't know. We saw the press photographers and the police bustling about when we walked with Baba to the car. The street was so crowded! And Baba's car rushed off with the siren blaring—just like the Chief Minister's!"

[Had Naren Dev11 ever imagined such a scene at Bhalobasha—the house he had built?]

The Right Person

"Hello Navonita! How's life? Meeting you after such a long time!" The tall, gray-haired, aged South Indian gentleman entered the room with a smile. He wore a well-cut dark suit. A red tie.

"I'm Keshavan! Surely, you recognize me? Remember the 1985 Bangalore Conference?" He put down the briefcase he was carrying on the table. He said he had a few books to give me. But the briefcase refused to open. I offered help—"Here, let me do it." But he had already dived for my watch that lay on the table. And started using the clasp of its metal strap as a lever. I tried to protest, but Keshavan consoled me, "It's nearly done!" And with those words the briefcase sprang open. A delighted Keshavan pronounced, "Just a little bit of skill!"

He took out the books carefully. Two novels. One, a collection of short stories. All three written in English. And a manuscript. A computer print-out of a new novel. I had a quick look—it didn't look too bad. I was overwhelmed to receive the books from an aging gentleman.

"Thank you! Thank you so very much!"

"I read your article in the papers. You've said that Indians who write in English and publish in India belong to a different class from English writers who are published abroad. The nature of their reception is different,

Nabaneeta Dev Sen / 45

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^{11.} Nabaneeta's father, an important Bengali writer of his time.

their readership is different and that makes a difference to the quality of their readership is unreaders what an accurate description that is! Nobody understands this. You're the first to write about it."

stands this. Tou to the last I was in a hurry, I had to go out. So I rose.

"Thank you, Dr Keshavan. I shall certainly read it. Now I shall have to..."

"Of course! Read it by all means. You must read it too. In fact, you could read it before giving them to Dr Sen."

"To Dr. Sen!"

"You understand, don't you? If a book written in English isn't published abroad, it isn't worth anything! So I wanted to request Dr Sen, if he..."

"What can Dr Sen do? This is a novel-it isn't Economics"

"I need a literary agent in England. Dr Sen's books are all published abroad. I'm sure he'd be able to find me a literary agent, wouldn't he?" I was astounded and speechless.

"I want him to read my manuscript. I'm sure you'll be able to persuade him to read it. This has everything he wants-famine, hunger, women's oppression. He'll love it. This novel takes up all the things he has researched on. If he could get the book published abroad...You could request him."

"Dr Keshavan, you could post him the book with a letter. It's best to get in touch directly."

"But I don't know him. You could recommend it to him, couldn't vou?"

"Listen. You might want to take the other books back. Since it won't really serve your purpose."

"Oh no! How can I do that? You read it first and pass it on to Dr Sen. No hurry. Arundhuti Roy became such a success because of her agent. Dr Sen is the right person! If he helps me, I'll be head and shoulders above Arundhuti Roy. And Vikram Seth. If only he could get me a literary agent abroad..."

Behind his thick glasses, Keshavan's eyes turned dreamy. Suddenly, he clasped my hands, "You will request him on my behalf, won't you?"

After Keshavan left, I noticed that my watch showed five past eleven. It had stopped the moment the briefcase had sprung open.

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The Woods Sang in Praise, but I Heard Not

The metro roared ceaselessly. Quite a crowd. Two men were chatting despite the noise. I couldn't see their faces.

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"That's a good point. It's absolutely true. Everyone is fussing over the man, nobody seems to be paying serious attention to his work. There's no impact of that on our national life. Just a hullabaloo. Not a thing has changed in our economy."

The woman sitting next to me, gave me a nudge, and like a carnel lengthened her neck into the discussion:

"But look at the way the prices of things are shooting up! I don't see any 'development' at all. What did Bengalis gain from the Nobel Prize, eh? Has Amartya Sen managed to douse out the blaze of rising prices?"

"You're right!" Somebody supported the old woman, "What kind of economist is he if he can't bring down prices?"

A youthful voice wafted in:

"Let me tell you, Mashima, that isn't Amartya Sen's responsibility! You should ask the ministers that. And we all know why he was given the Nobel Prize, don't we?"

"Why? Why was he given the Prize?"

"Last year the Economics prize was given to two American con men—and the Nobel committee was in utter disgrace! They made up for it by giving the prize to an honest, learned man—one who will be accepted by everybody."

The compartment metamorphosed into a special seminar on Amartya Sen. With all passengers participating enthusiastically. The more heated the discussion got, the more agitated I felt. So far I'd been invisible in the crowd; but what if some experienced eye should spot the face of Amartya Sen's first wife? I wouldn't be able to stand it! Not one bit.

Meanwhile, I noticed that the bespectacled woman to my left was glancing at me off and on. There could be no doubts about that. She was looking at me. Her gaze was dangerous. It was impossible to stay in the compartment. I would have to get off at the next station. What if they discovered me in the middle of this intense Amartya seminar

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chemical State of the may be a Marxist economist in name. But it is important to ask how much of his work, and theory, is really Leftist."

"Of course not! He belongs to the Left."

"But to what extent?"

"I don't know. But I think he can be called a Social Democtat," "Can you tell me why the Government is fussing so much over him; State guest-and limousine...."

"They are fussing a lot. But there must be a motive. The Government," will make use of him in some way...."

"Not that. He taught the Minister—this is just a way of repaying the debt to one's teacher! Nothing more."

The woman still stared at me, mesmerized. Why do you gaze at my face, O mother?'12

Finally, I would not manage to go to Girish Park.

"Whatever you say. He's a good man. Thinks of the poor,"

A new voice. With a Nabadwip accent.

"The market is a towering inferno. If he thinks of the poor-let him control the prices first."

The old woman sang the same tune. And the agitation in my heart remained unchanged. I decided to get off when the train stopped I was uncomfortable.

At that moment there was a slight pressure on my left arm. I looked; it was that same woman. She was beaming.

"Aren't you Nabaneeta?"

"No, I'm not." I was desperate. I couldn't take this.

"No? How strange!" The woman's bright smile faded instantly. A deep darkness descended on her face.

"But I was so sure—you do look so exactly like Nabaneeta Dev Sen. You could pass for her double."

"I know. Many people have said that before. I hear it so often!"

"My goodness! You even have the same mannerisms! I saw her at the Book Fair. From a distance, of course! Please don't mind. I'm sorry to bother you."

"Of course not. What does it matter. I hear it all the time." I smiled as sweetly as I could.

And it turned out to be a wrong strategy. The woman shuddered "You even smile like her. How strange! It's uncanny."

"You know what? Actually, I am a great fan of her writings. I love

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^{12.} Echo of a song by Rabindranath Tagore Keno cheye achcho go Ma?; literally, "Why are you looking at me, O mother?'

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to read her." The woman almost spoke to herself. "I buy her books as to read little come out. Even my mother loves Nabaneeta Dev Sen's soon as I have often thought of meeting her, but I've never found the writings. When I saw you today, it was like being handed the moon!" The woman fell silent for a while.

"And I thought to myself, 'Oh my god-how lucky I am today! My favourite writer is sitting right next to me!' And so close to me."

"All this while, I have been gathering the courage to speak. And look what a terrible mistake I have made!"

"We all make mistakes." My voice nearly broke.

"To tell you the truth, I was so disappointed when I heard that you were not Nabaneeta. I wish I could have imagined a meeting instead." "Why not do that?"

"That can't be. I had her latest book with me. I had thought I would get it autographed. Can't imagine that two people can look so alike!"

"Why not visit her at her house, with the book?" I spoke after clearing my throat.

"I haven't managed to, so far. I doubt that will ever happen." The woman gave a dismayed smile, "I curse my luck!"

I couldn't wait till Girish Park. I got off at the very next station. I, too, cursed my luck!

Translated from Bengali by Indira Chowdhury

Pigeon's Nest on Dhanjhury Hills

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Sudhir Kumar Karan

The month of Falgun was just about to end. Barren, undulated fields stretched on all sides. Here and there bushy green patches of forests and among the forest-stretches and fields were scattered desolate, futile hillocks having absolutely no vegetation. Barren fields were occasionally life up with the fiery red palas flowers. Throughout the night, mahul flowers dropped down, drip-drop, from the mohua trees in the forest. Long before the day dawns, when the first cock crows, childless old widows, girls in their teens and young, unmarried women carrying baskets move from tree to tree collecting these flowers. Golden yellow mahul flowers full of juice are prize possessions! Dried up in the sun they become foodstuff; even intoxicating liquors are extracted from them. At times when the night becomes deep and dark, fiendish, black ferocious bears come down from the distant forests with their cubs to pick up these mahul flowers. On certain occasions they come alone, and, sipping the juice of these flowers, become tipsy. But they return to Putualekha forest about ten miles away on staggering steps long before the day dawns. Now and then if they come face to face with humans they tear off the skin from the forehead of the man, with their sharp nails that then pass upon the eyes and face. Nevertheless, later on at some other time wounded by the poisoned dart of the Santals - sons of the soil – they writhe in pain in some dark cave amidst the dense forests.

My elder brother informed us: "You must get up very early; we must reach before sunrise. We'll have to walk at least three miles. A sal forest lies beyond Shushungdungry and Kurchibani. Beyond the sal forest stretches the open field. Crossing the field one has to reach Dhanjhury hills. And there, that amazing spectacle reveals itself!"

Lying in the hammock-like bed at night we were discussing about that amazing pageant. We did not have any idea what exactly that wonderful sight was! Hearing what our elder brother said, we imagined that he would

show us wild pigeons. But what unique marvel could lie hidden therein, we show us wonderful Life itself was one in which everything appeared to be wonderful. Life itself was full of startling surprises. Only appeared appeared to sleep together. It's really strange a month ago we had got the permission to sleep together. It's really strange a monurage come to celebrate our honeymoon in this Santala village that we have that we have the mammed Daahigodaa. Lying in the hammock at night I tried to explain to Meeru, the city-bred girl, that the meaning of dungry is a small hillock, daahi means the field of hard barren soil and boni is small forest. And Meeru

Mustering the fiery passion of her entire body, Meera whispered in my ears, "I—I, your Meeru!" I joined in the refrain, "My Meeru—my mynamy lovebird!" Meeru said, "Do you know, that day when you called me Meeru Soma chuckled mischievously!" I replied, "Why wouldn't she laugh? Do you know what Meeru means in the Santali language?" Meera retorted in wonder, "Oh God, is Meeru a word of the Santali tongue? 'Meera' is styled as 'Meeru' by everybody endearingly - mother, father, brother everyone!"

I added, "Why don't you include me in your list? Of course, even I didn't know that in Santali language 'Meeru' means a bird that can whistle very melodiously; it's also very beautiful to look at! And, to crown it all, Santals use the word 'Meeru' in their songs in the sense of their ladylove."

"Is it? Really?" Saying this Meera became ecstatic! She never got the opportunity of spending nights in expansive, unrestrained environment like this. As if she herself was becoming one with nature—prakruti; and she was constantly reminded of the fact that in the hammocklike bed almost becoming one with herself lay her male counterpart—purush of the prakruti!

Meeru suddenly pronounced, "Purush!" and then added, "Do you know what happened that day? Soma took me with her to bathe that evening in the lake. There we found Santal women bathing. You were then standing beneath a mohua tree. You were not able to see us from your position; but we could see you clearly. Do you know what they said pointing toward you?"

"What did they say?"

"They asked, 'Who is that guy?- Must be your purush!' Thereafter they all burst into laughter, all together! The water of the lake seemed to vibrate with their laughter. I was ashamed and I blushed! But what else could I do? I also started laughing along with them."

I then reminded Meeru, "That day when two of us went to bathe in the lake—no one else was there; what happened that day?" Meeru pinched my arm and said, "What a fun was it! Really we are very happy, aren't we? But you are extremely shameless and saucy!" I retorted, "Am I?" Meeru

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softly passed her hand all over my body and added, "No, it can never be!" You—you are my purush! You are a wonder of wonders!!"

-you are my purus. To added further, "But the real wonder is this hammocklike bed of ropes! I call it swing. Legs and the frame made with bamboo; and woven with ropes of babui grass. Could you ever dream of sleeping in such hammocklike beds leaving behind the four poster bedsteads of our urban abode? You can never be separated from your bedfellow even if you would like to."

What Meeru understood, I could not make out. She said, "Really wonderful! Everything is amazing! Fields and fallow, hills and forests, cascades and embankments – Santal villages, Binda Soren's daughter Soma - You and I - everything, everything is wonderful!!"

Of course, Meeru was a bit alarmed before coming here. When I told her, "Our elder brother is now staying in a Santal village near Seraikela supervising settlement work: Why don't we spend our honeymoon in close communication with nature there in the Santal village?" Meeru had retorted: "In the Santal village? Won't it be a dreadful experience to live among the Santals?" I replied "Why dreadful? Santals are far better than civilized animals like us! Just go once and find out for yourself!" Meeru replied, "Let us go! If you are with me there is nothing to fear."

When I wrote to my elder brother that we wanted to go there for a pleasure trip, he also was somewhat reluctant. He was not really worned about me; but considering the inconveniences Meeru would have to face, he was hesitant. A city-bred girl educated in urban colleges may have to face a lot of short-comings there.

No bathroom, no latrine—everything is in the wide open. One has to take bath in the lake; one has to go to the wide open field to answer the call of nature! A number of other little drawbacks.

But after some consideration, my elder brother replied:

My dear brother,

I have arranged for your stay in the house of Binda Soren of Daahigodaa village. Binda Soren is the chieftain of the village. He is also somewhat educated and a real good soul! I have struck up friendship with him. His house is quite neat and clean. He has agreed to spare a room for your stay. The womenfolk of his family are also quite good. They all treat me with loving care. You will certainly like Binda Soren's daughter at first sight. Attempts are being made to get her suitably married. Binda Soren also possesses quite some land; I have measured and settled these lands in his favour. Often he sends chickens for me. You will come to know everything where everything when you come here. The room that he has spared for you is totally outside, having no connection with his inner apartments. Bring your

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bedding and mosquito net. Mosquito net may not be necessary; there are bedding and mosquitoes here! I have also arranged an aged woman belonging hardly any heartiest blace in aged woman belonging to the barbar class; she'll cook and do other household chores for you. You and your wife have my heartiest blessings. That's all.

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Your Elder Brother

When we stepped into the compound of Binda Soren, secured by the boundary wall some robust, ruddy dogs glared at us with suspicious anger. One among them even started growling in order to prevent us from entering. Binda Soren's daughter stopped him saying, "What a shame, Hadi!" The womenfolk welcomed us with bowls of water. We became their kinsfolk washing our feet with water. The room meant for our stay had a mud floor; but it was neatly polished with cowdung mix. Walls were washed with white soil. It had only one door and a window placed high up on the wall. In the entire Santal colony, no one was having a homestead like that of Binda Soren. Being the chieftain of the village, Binda Soren had to entertain police inspectors, the tehshildar, and revenue tax collectors often serving them rice and chicken curry. Some of them also relished country liquor or wine. At one corner of the room, a brick oven was kept ready for cooking. There was of course, no other furniture in the room except a bedstead woven with ropes. In the beginning it was quite taut; but after one night, it became slack like a hammock.

Our elder brother was staying in a neighbouring village not very far away. A few days elapsed; we were fascinated by the enchantment of phenomenal nature, and even failed to distinguish between day and night. The crystalline, curly water of the lake soothed and refreshed our body and mind! Lying in the hammocklike string bed we remained wide awake the whole night. Strangely enough we had so many things to talk about! Everything was wonderful! We also discussed about the incident of Soma lying in our bed. Meeru said, "That day when you went away somewhere to see an old Shiva temple with your brother in the afternoon, Soma came to me finding me alone. She remained standing at the doorstep hesitating to come inside. She looked searching for something; thereafter, all of a sudden, pointing at the bed, started laughing hilariously. She said, Your name is Meeru, indeed'. Then she started laughing again. Really a very good and innocent girl. Though quite dark in complexion, but she is as graceful as a krishnakali flower. Moreover, how immaculate she is. As a matter of fact they wear nothing on the upper part of their body; They cover their breasts with the coarse, thickset sarees only. I myself felt rather ashamed. I offered het a blouse to wear. But she refused and said, "We don't wear such robes!" And again she started laughing.

Sudhir Kumar Karan / 53

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I added, "What's the use of trying to make her unnatural and so I added, what's the and and so phisticated! Her blooming seventeen-year-old physique will not at all fit into phisticated! Her blooming by your urban Kolkata atmosphere. Here she is exquisite and inimitable in this your urban Kolkata attroop your urban Kolkata attroop rustic atmosphere and surroundings; splendid and superb like a bright how beautiful those two... "Means of the bright how beautiful those two..." krishnakali flower. Really, how beautiful those two...." Meeru pinched me with her fingers. I added, "Two unsullied, undefiled, fresh flowers for sacrificial offering!" Meeru suddenly became silent. Perhaps she was mentally trying to contrast the youth bred amidst the urban brick and stones with the juvenile vigour flourishing in the abundant, pristine expanse of hills and forests! Or she became jealous hearing me speak like that. I could not make out exactly which.

Tickling me with her fingers she said, "In fact, after coming here it appears to me that Soma is far happier than me! Really a very good girl. Does all household chores; brings water carrying the pitcher on her head: picks up Mohul flowers from the forest. And, above all, sings so sweetly One day they all will dance in a group; we would go to see them dancing" Meeru came closer. In the faint flicker of a hurricane lantern that served as witness to us - purush and prakruti - in the hammocklike bed!

I couldn't make out how far the night had advanced. Luminous moonbeams were bathing the world outside. Just at our doorstep, two dogs were keeping watch on us. By this time they had taken us to be their friends.

Meeru said, "We would wake up very early in the morning; won't it be real fun?"

"What fun?"

"Oh-ho! What fun? Fun of roaming about in the wide, open country!"

In the month of Falgun, springtime nights are covered with a gende chill like thin sheets. By and by we must fall asleep closely clung together. Night must have far advanced; Street dogs were running about growing incessantly. Soma's Hadam Didi or grandmother was fast asleep on the open portico across the courtyard spreading a palm-leaf mattress. I requested her to wake us up much before dawn as we were supposed to go to see the pigeon's nest in Dhanjhury Hills.

But it was as if sleep had fled from my eyelids! Our whole being had become soaked with the fragrance of the night of the spring, colours of the palas flowers and the odour of mohua blossoms. How can one sleep in such an atmosphere? Once it appeared to me that someone was trying to make a wait of the wait of the make a wait of the wait to make a pair of pigeons copulate putting them inside a cage. Prior to our matriage we will our marriage we did not know each other. Of course, we had seen each other: But over the other; But even this was not an exercise done alone between two of usl We saw each other amidst a host of relatives. Thereafter we are living in

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a cage, preparing to love each other and to bring forth children to multiply our lineage. Everybody says we had become an exquisite match!

I was perhaps reminded of all these as we proposed to pay a visit to see the pigeon's nests on Dhanjhury hills. In my childhood when I was staying in the village, I remember that our elder brother had a craze, for taming pigeons; it was like an addiction to him. As soon as he heard of some new variety of pigeon being available somewhere, he rushed to that spot on his bicycle—even if it were ten or twenty miles away. No body could restrain him!

In the inner courtyard of our house in the village there was a huge loft - a special abode for pigeons - an enormous hall-like cage. Within that cage hung earthen pitchers layer after layer. Pigeons belonging to various classes and categories built their nests within those pitchers. On four corners of the cage four tall sal posts were planted on which was built an attic. And on that attic was constructed pigeon's nests with split bamboos. They were like rooms with a small door for the pigeons to enter and come out. Doors were opened in the morning and again bolted up in the evening. Beneath the attic in the empty space were dumped ploughshares, yokes, wheels of bullock carts, spades, wicker baskets, hoes, mowers and many other rural farming implements. On the attic the pigeon's nests were arranged in two storeys. In the first floor were kept the pedigree pigeonsgorgeous, multicoloured varieties: fantail, blue owl, pouter, tumbler, and the like. And on the upper floor all the countrybred homing pigeons were cluttered together—ash coloured thus with black stripes on wings and necks. Among them there were quite some normal, grey, conventional pigeons that were far more aggressive than others.

Getting up early in the morning, the first duty of our elder brother was to climb up the ladder and open the doors. Thereafter he sprinkled a basketful of paddy-rice and pulses mixed together. He did this daily before attending to any other work. If he had to go out of station on some work, he entrusted this to us.

As soon as the pigeons heard his voice calling "Ah!.. Ti—ti—ti—ii..." hundreds of pigeons rushed out of the narrow doors and filled up the entire courtyard. Nothing except the pigeons were visible then. If some pigeons didn't find a place to perch, they sat upon his head, arms, or shoulders and flapped their wings for some time.

When sun's rays flashed, upon them they presented a fabulous spectacle: a kaleidoscope of garish pageantry of wave upon wave of colours! At times to enjoy that unique iridescence of colours! kept my eyes half-closed: And then the pigeons vanished—only waves of colour dazzled various shades — black, white, grey, brown, copper — a whole prism

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spectrum! Over and above all this, elder brother had another whim: tec. spectrum! Over and above an reating the creation of God—adding colours upon already existing huce reating the creation of God—adding colours upon already existing huce For this he chose mainly white pigeons. Red, green, yellow, violet—one could For this he chose mainly white P of this he chose mainly white P of this he chose mainly white P of the could represent the co to their original colours after getting drenched in rain once or twice. But such colouring chastisement was not meted out to pedigree pigeons even if they were of white colour. Colours were also prescribed for those pigeons on whose legs white feathers grew. In such a resplendent world of colours, the pigeons lived matching colour with colour!

This was quite a pleasurable sight for me; but another reason for this significant enjoyment was the incessant twittering heard in the cage of the homing pigeons; This sound roused my lust! Yet I also liked the stately gait of the pedigree pigeons. Elder brother often said, "Have you noted the way they walk about? As if they were kings in soap operas!" Saying this he laughed heartily. Indeed, the aristocratic bearing was a sight to seel let black – somewhat like cuckoos – Mukkhi pigeons wearing moon-circles on their heads jerked their shining bluish necks; peacock-like fantail pigeons flaunted their beauty about with stately gestures. It seemed that they were getting ready to perform the gaudy Chhau dance. Donning black jacket upon white outfit, when the Siraji pigeons basked in the sun in a group ther appeared like kings and queens of Iraq-Iran-Badakshan. And when the giant copper-coloured Kabuli pigeons walked with stately grace, it appeared that they were real Shylocks among pigeons lending money with high interest rates.

But all the inmates of our house - though not the elder brother looked down upon and pitied the plebian countrybred homing pigeons. Perhaps they could guess our repulsive attitude towards them; as if they have committed a great sin by being born as homing pigeons. Without caring for our compassion they flew away in the group quite early in the morning and returned at dusk. They gathered their own food without waiting for the mercy of the householders like the sophisticated, pedigree pigeons. Not that these pampered pigeons didn't want to fly away into the wide open sky; but they were habitually lethargic and indolent. Moreover, many of them had the feathers of their wings tied up with fine strings so as to prevent them from being captured by others while flying away far from home.

While coupling with each other in the thatched mud cottage of Binda Soren, the chieftain of Daahigodaa village, I spoke about the memories of my childhood regarding the pigeons and whispered in Meeru's ears, appears are very all in the pigeons are very all geons are very vulgar! They don't have any sense of decency; no sense of private moments and said, private moments like humans!" Meeru pinched me as usual and said, "Phew!" and those all and said, "Phew!" and then added, "But I am very fond of domesticating pigeons. How beautifully they live together!"

I also supported her, "I am also thinking in the same line. Elder brother brought one pigeon from here and another from somewhere else; and then put them together in a small cage—one male and the other female. Food and water was supplied in that cage itself. At first they never looked at each other; sat sulkily at separate corners. The male one at times knocked the female away to one corner; they also quarrelled with each other and for some days remained alienated from each other. Can you guess what happened after that?" Meeru replied, "What else? They became friends once again." I appreciated, "Well, you know everything! Not mere patching up, both of them sat together touching each others beak. And the male pigeon went round and round the female in courtship offering love! Bak Bakum Kum...Bak Bakum Kum. Then the elder brother freed them from their nuptial cage and allowed them to mix up with other pigeons." Meeru added, "How amazing, isn't it? Two completely alien creatures put together in one cage starts building their home."

"Exactly like us, isn't it?" I echoed.

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Meeru pressed my thighs which thrilled her. I further said, "You must have noted their unique knack in laying eggs, incubating the eggs by sitting upon them to bring forth the chicks, and also the rearing of the nestlings. Meeru said nothing more; but her gestures indicated that she wanted to be sportive!

I must not have been reminded of those lines from T.S.Eliot: 'Nothing but three things—birth copulation and....' No, I won't utter the last word! Uttering that would mean death—end of life! When and how we fell asleep, we didn't know. From outside could be heard the ringing of the cycle-bell of our elder brother. The bell was ringing quite loudly. Soma's grandmother was also thumping upon our door to wake us up. We woke up and got ready wearing our clothes. Coming out we found that the day had not yet dawned. Pigs of the Santal colony had started running towards the field, grunting. Hens had not yet come out to scratch the ash and dung heap in search of insects. Only the cocks had crowed once, swelling their necks and were preparing for the second call.

I wore a snow white shirt and Kabuli sandals. Meeru donned a chocolate-coloured silk saree with a green, stylish blouse. She wore sandals; carried a small hand bag; and a bindi on her forehead to complete her outfit.

I could not make out why our elder brother looked at us in amazement! Had our dresses become too sleek for the occasion? Elder brother wore shorts, khaki half-shirt and a bowler hat. He said, "It would have been better if we started somewhat earlier. Yet we would reach on time if we walk with brisk steps." Dragging his cycle along with him he climbed on to the main road. We followed him from behind. Meeru pulled at my shirt

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Digitized by Arya Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri once. Looking behind I found Soma standing at the door of their house watching us intently. Meeru said in a subdued tone, Soma wanted to come with us. Should we invite her?" Pressing Meeru's finger I said, "No!" Then we started walking as quickly as we could.

Elder Brother said, "Guiding both of you to the spot I'll proceed on to Kalikapur. Survey work will start there at 7 o'clock in the morning" I assured him, "All right, you need not worry. We can safely return on our own." Thereafter we walked on and on silently. To continue to walk speechlessly in deathlike silence didn't appear nice! Hence I said by way of gossip, "An extremely arid country; Yet it is full of colours of all varieties!"

Till then Meeru could not muster up enough courage to talk audibly in the presence of her elder brother-in-law. Though the custom of covering the entire face with long-drawn veils was no longer prevalent, Meeru had not totally done away with her veil in front of her elder in-laws. She added with a mild, melodious voice, "Very beautiful, quiet country; not at all suffocating like Kolkata." Emphasizing upon the issue of desolation I added, "Obviously secluded and lonesome!" Meeru appeared to be somewhat abashed as she had discovered beauty in solitude. And thereafter she walked on without any further comments.

Elder Brother said, "I have spent almost half of my life traversing hills, forests, and fallows! Now I like the company of such phenomenal nature more than that of human beings. Have you observed how colouful these surroundings are!" Saying these words he directed our attention towards a blooming palas tree. Indeed, it was impossible to overlook ita whole treeful of mud-coloured vermilion flowers. They were coloured hectic red like the beak of parrots or shuk birds: hence they are named kingshuk! Verual luxuriance of the palas or dhak flower - the flame of the forest - captures the blood all of a sudden and thrills the whole being! Sun had not yet risen; the eastern horizon had just started becoming brightened up with colours. Stretched out on all sides lay the arid fallow like sapless, parched logs of wood. Here and there huge lumps of stone lay scattered; at some places one could come across dead, dry hills like hungry sharks. Beneath the mohua trees Santal girls could be seen—most of them were adolescent girls wearing loin-clothes only. By this time we had already come down from the metalled main road to the dusty country path leading to the edge of the forest of hill jasmine or kurchi flowers.

Elder Brother assured us, "Now we'll have to walk along the border of the *kurchi* forest. We have almost reached the spot—there you can see the hills!" We had already sighted the hills from a distance, though its heights were yet hidden behind the *kurchi* forest. From a distance it appeared like a huge, sprawling lizard!

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Elder Brother said, "The bicycle will have to be kept here in the *kurchi* bushes. It won't be possible to drag it up the rough terrain any more, this whole forest is full of thorny shrubs and *kurchi* bushes. Amidst these runs whole forest is full of thorny shrubs and *kurchi* bushes. Amidst these runs the narrow, walking track." I enquired, "Won't someone steal the bicycle?" "Here the question of stealing or dacoity does not arise," Brother

"Here the question of stealing of dacoity does not arise," Brother replied, "but you two take care of your clothes; they may be torn, caught by the thorns! One should not come to such bushy woodlands wearing a clothes."

Looking at me Meeru asked, "Are there any tigers or bears in this jungle?" Without looking at her Elder Brother replied, "No, no—no such animals are there in this forest. It is doubtful whether even jackals are there. In fact, this is not a real forest; merely thickset bushes of *kurchi* plants!" Keeping his bicycle concealed behind a bush, Elder Brother proceeded to the interior of the jungle. Meeru and I followed him. Sometimes Meeru was ahead of me and I would be in the front. The path was so narrow it was not possible to walk side by side. On both sides there were thorny plum trees. Wild branches were obstructing our path but they were not able to stop our progress.

Till then, we could not make out what was that wonderful spectacle in order to witness which our Elder Brother was taking us all this way! Colours have started to appear on the eastern sky; and the colours gradually became more and more resplendent. The sky was fast-changing its colour. I looked at Meeru and she smiled in appreciation! Thereupon the kurchi forest ended.

As soon as we crossed the *kurchi* forest all of us became spellbound in amazement! Inconceivable! Everyone became dumbfounded all at once! Only elder brother whispered almost inaudibly lest the quiet silence of rumination of eternity should be disturbed in the enchantment of this ethereal dreamland. "Look! Phenomenal nature is preserved in her pristine purity here—nature, whole and consumate!" Saying this he took off his hat and stood still. It appeared that he stood in meditation to honour and salute nature!

Meeru stood quite close to me. We were standing on a meadow not totally arid, and was covered with green grass. We were surprised to find in front of us a wide aqueduct-like marshy land full of wild grass. Just beyond this swamp was Dhanjhury hills, shaped like the English letter 'L'. One side of this hill sloped towards the *kurchi* forest; huge boulders like the heads of buffaloes lay scattered there. I looked at Meeru once. Her expression exhibited utter amazement. Somewhat awestruck, she was pethaps a bit frightened!

Beyond the creek the summit of the hills was spread out like the

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umbrella—Pigitized by Arya Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri umbrella—like hood type Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri like some familiar hills! Just umbrella—like nood of small like the hood-like canopy, innumerable grottoes were visible as black beneath the hood-like canopy, by what freak of nature such fanciers beneath the hood-like carriery, cockpits. God alone knows by what freak of nature such fanciful design this distance the niches were not clearly rich. had been created. From this distance the niches were not clearly visible, But it appeared that someone had pasted cowdung cakes for drying up black cowdung blotches as it were! No one will ever be able to scale that steep height; a quite high, vertical rise was it! As if someone had chopped the height; a quite ingri, verter hills into half and created that high-rise. From Daahigodaa village only the rear side of this hill was visible, rather flat in appearance.

A strange fascination had almost hypnotized all of us: such dead desolation brought about a cold shiver within us! I recollected Elder Brother saying that due to some unknown reason no one came here alone; no one ever dreamt of going to the other side crossing the swamp. Thousands of leeches and poisonous snakes were grovelling in the bog. Santals come to worship the hills: but they never approach it from this side. They come from the rear side that is visible from the village.

Standing spellbound for quite some time it seemed that something catastrophic was going to happen. Did I lose my senses? Gradually the hills faded away and I stood in a field of misty haze totally alone—neither Meen nor my elder brother was there. My clothes, and everything melted awar from my consciousness—a naked stout and healthy young man, having a well-paid job in a government office! Is that hill a real magic mountain! I wanted to clasp the void around me as if to save myself! An almost inaudible whisper must have escaped my lips. I was startled hearing Elder Brother's call, "Hey-ho! Are you able to hear?"

Yet, I could hear now! It seemed that there was a waterfall somewhere in the neighbourhood. Soon as the idea of the waterfall came to my mind I found that Meeru had moved quite close to me! Everything - Elder Brother, hills, forests, the swamp - everything became quite clear to the sight once again. I could hear the thundering boom of the waterfall; but nowhere in the vicinity was there any cataract! In fact, Dhanjhury hills can never have any waterfall! I pricked up my ears to capture the sound. Is the waterfall within the belly of the hills? The innumerable cubbyholes on the body of the hills appeared to be throbbing with effervescence. As though water from a thousand fountains was gushing out and leaping into the swamp. My apprehension was gradually becoming conviction! That unearthly, uncanny sound was emerging out of the very core of the hills. It seemed that the entire hill would burst out into pieces whining!

All of us were dumbfounded. We were all breathlessly keen to witness cerie supergraph. some eerie supernatural spectacle! From within the very centre of the hills rolled out that income rolled out that incessant sound, that mysterious, agitating uproar. Hills 10

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longer appeared to be lifeless or inert! The gnawing agony of the primeval longer appearing of life seemed to be grating within the hills. If that uproar would burst forth and spout out like a single fountainhead, then we would have burst form and the primardial panic of first creation of the rare experience of witnessing the primardial panic of first creation of life in the universe!

Meeru looked at me once—it seemed that she wanted a safe shelter; but she could not speak out in the presence of our Elder Brother. I looked at her—looked at her in a helpless way! And then suddenly....

Shaking the entire stupor of seclusion with a jolt, millions, billions and trillions of pigeons started emerging from within the belly of Dhanjhury hills incessantly! Like the perpetual flow of light-winged balloons, they flew on and on. Black and murky—a swarthy, sable, floating current at once covered the entire firmament like a pristine primitive haze! Over our heads, there appeared to be a cloudy, undulating canopy.

Elder Brother said, "Did you see the whole spectacle? Isn't it really astounding?" Without uttering a single word I nodded my assent. I could hear Meeru's whisper, "Incredibly strange!" I looked at her once again; she appeared to be utterly helpless! Standing face to face with something enormously vast, man painfully realizes his own microscopic insignificance—he feels paralysed: Meeru appeared, flabbergasted thus.

Looking at both of us Elder Brother said, "Let me take leave; I am getting delayed for my survey work. You needn't be apprehensive! No one will come this way! Just sit here for some time and see the spectacle. Then walk back home leisurely." Saying these words he put on his hat and vanished into the kurchi forest.

Meeru was just waiting for this! At once she threw herself on my breast trembling! I sat down upon the grass folding her in my arms. I then asked, "Are you alarmed?" Meeru nodded; she looked at me with her deep eyes just once.

Within the twinkling of an eye the pigeons whipped off in flocks, on all directions—north, south, east, west—and vanished. A few of them, segregated from the main stream, descended beside the swamp. We could hear a sudden rustling, whizz! In front of our very eyes, suddenly, a hawk, with lightening speed swooped, down upon a pigeon and snatched it away with its talons right over our head. A drop of blood fell upon the ground.

Humans may not normally be afraid of hawks; but the spectacle of this drop of blood created a peculiar sensation of horror in my mind! May not be fear exactly; but in this intense desolation, the trifling incident of the hawk's pouncing upon the pigeon appeared like a ghastly murder to me! In the pigeonholes on the hills in front, hundreds and thousands of eggs or pigeon chicks must have been dreaming of the future at that time. In

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to witness of the hills r. Hills no Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri fact, such bare loneliness appeared intolerable to me. By that time the half had begun to be dazzling in the sunlight. All around us stretched the forest hills and fallows. All our civilized trappings — clothes, culture, thoughts, lone passion — seemed dull and lackluster in this immensity!

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I could not fathom what Meeru was thinking! She was as if trying to hide herself within my body. Scratching and clasping me in a mad frenzy she tried to capture some primitive fervour! Perhaps a waterfall toated within her bosom. I embraced her to give her a snug shelter. And at that very moment Soma's glittering eyes appeared to be flashing upon my face. Meeru whispered, "Will anyone come this way?"

I replied, "Yes, they have come; see Meeru, startled from her revente with a jerk, looked all around.

"Why! I can't find anyone!"

"Don't be afraid. Neither humans nor any wild beast. Just see...." I pointed at a pair of pigeons at some distance. Why at all they didn't fly away with the entire flock, I couldn't make out.

Meeru remained staring at them. The male one went round and round the other one weaving love circles as it were, cooing with bloated throat, "Bak Bakoom Koom." No one should come within this circle, no one The female went on acknowledging these overtures at times projecting her neck, closing her eyes, or even bending towards the male. And thereafter she surrendered to the male pigeon at last!

Meeru laughed looking at me. I said, "Let us go and sit inside the kurchi forest!" Thereafter, how long we locked ourselves up inside the den of that small kurchi forest, God alone knows! When we started walking back towards Daahigodaa, my dhoti had collected quite some thorny bristles and the shirt was daubed with the sap of leaves from trees. The skirt of Meeru's Sari had been torn by the prickly wild thorns. By the time we returned to Daahigodaa it was almost midday. Soma was probably waiting for us. She burst out laughing as soon as she saw us: there wasn't' any scorn or mockery in her laughter; pure pristine laughter like the undefiled water of crystalline streams. Meeru also smiled. I couldn't look straight at Soma's face. With a guilty conscience I sneaked into the room bending my head down.

Soma took Meeru with her to bathe in the pond. The water of the pond was clear and crystalline like the eyes of a crow; but Meeru was not used to take bath in such a wide open place! Soma felt no inhibitions; She swam nimble-limbed with utmost ease. Of course no male folks ever go to that side where women bathe. I also started towards the pond to take my bath with a towel on my shoulders—towards that part of the pond where male bathe. Though Soma and Meeru were not distinctly visible from

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rater of the ru was not oitions; She lks ever go and to take f the pond risible from this part of the pond, I could guess that they were sitting immersed in water, this part together. I could capture the cadence of their laughter. What huddled togst Meeru could have with Soma I could not fancy!

Closely clinging together in the hammock-bed at night Meeru said, "We won't stay here any longer. Let us leave tomorrow itself!" I replied, "We won? Here we are quite comfortable; nothing to worry about! That apart, don't you like Soma's company?"

Meeru promptly replied, "No, No! Soma is a very good girl. But she is fully mature; knows every secret of life! Do you know what she said hearing that we got frightened inside the forest?

"She said that the god and the goddess of the jungle live inside the forest. They terrorize people like that. They always..." Meeru stopped halfway.

"Always, what?"

Meeru smiled and said, "If you think Soma is quite innocent, she is not that simple! Oh God! How many things she taught me!"

"What all did she teach you?" I enquired.

"That I can't tell you!" Then she added, "Do you know what insight she gave me? She said, if you are lost in the forest or frightened..."

"What if you lose your direction?" I asked.

Meeru chuckled and said, "Ha! I can't speak that out."

"Then I shall have to ask Soma myself," I added.

"What a shame! Why should Soma tell you all that?"

"How am I to know all these, then?"

Meeru suddenly became somewhat grave and said, "Soma is really very naughty, remember that!"

Just to make her more irritated I added, "Do I not know that? I could know that at the very first sight! Once or twice she ogled at me in such a way...."

Meeru replied, "That's why I said we would go away from here tomorrow itself!" saying this Meeru hugged me in such a way as if someone was trying to snatch me away from her! Amazing! Even Meeru has become jealous! I added, "Then you are trying to fly away from Soma?"

Meeru at once relieved the tension of the whole atmosphere by the very tone of her voice, "No, Sir no! Not for that at all. What else is there to see here? We have seen everything that is worth seeing here. Otherwise Soma is quite a good girl; born and brought up in the village she doesn't have any sophistry in her speech! She plainly speaks out whatever she

"But what all she says, you are not telling me." I retorted. Meeru then statted laughing silently, yet convulsing with pleasure and said, "Then hear

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chemics way inside the forest then one loses one's way inside the forest then one Could the clothes. Thereafter dusting down the drees what Soma said. She said, it should take off all the clothes. Thereafter dusting down the dress carefully should take off all the clothes. This way you can drive out the curse of the contract them to the contract the contract the contract them to the contract the contract them to the contract the contract them to the contract the contract them to the contract the contract them to the contract them to the contract them to the you wear them again. This way you can drive out the curse of the god of the forest. But if this treatment fails then.... Thereafter she wanted to know whether we took off our clothes or not! Oh, what a naughty girl

I could not rejoice at Meeru's words: I simply yawned! There wasn't any change in my attitude, because I knew about what had Meeru said Meeru didn't know these. From my very childhood I knew about this belief among the villagers, which Meeru never heard of! And she didn't also know the significance of all this! Perhaps Soma was also not aware of the meaning of this belief. Of course this does yet stand up to reason. But to me the import of this custom was quite explicit! Nobody has ever told me the significance; but I could very well comprehend the significance behind this practice! Meeru was feeling sleepy; she turned the other way.

The Pigeon's nest of Dhanjhury hills shrouded my entire consciousness. In thousands niches they had prepared their nests—laying eggs, copulating incessantly, and then dying. Again they are born, again copulation and finally death! Between this perpetual cycle, lies the struggle for existence Human love, human passion—fascination for coupling human habitation and domesticity—all this appeared to be nothing more than the pigeon's nest! After all, there is every reason for the forest god to become angry with us. Man is no longer nature's natural offspring; otherwise why has he turned iconoclast mercilessly destroying the forest reserves. Soma had asked us to become nude inside the bare nature. She had advised us rightly 10 imbibe the pristine purity of life itself. But that is not possible like finding the elixir of life. We cannot go back to nature any more. We have become faint-hearted and alarmed when aspired to nature. We can never again become pristine—can never walk barefoot in nature! Even if we are lost in the wilderness due to the fury of god! Why we alone even Soma too would not be able to become purely natural and nude in the lap of nature. Yet they are somewhat closer to nature. From Kolkata, Daahigodaa is fu far away. Moreover, the distance of the rural settings of my childhood is day by day becoming far distant from the hills of Dhanjhury.

I was feeling horribly sleepy! Those pigeons of Dhanjhury hills were hanging over my head like a canopy, black and ominous. But there was no sound coming out of their wings.

Translated from Bengali by Manish Chakravarty

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Fragments from My Autobiography

Asim Rej

He could not decide where to begin the story of his life. He wrote the first paragraph...and then struck it out. It was something like this:

I grew up in a dark, fetid, dirty alley in the suburbs. In the corner stood a giant water tower, our obvious landmark. It was hard to find your way out if you happened to enter this dark, narrow, serpentine alley. A once-blue tin sign at the corner announced the name of our alley. Facing this was a forbidden ghetto, which was out of bounds for us. Our rather large family of eight had moved here because we couldn't afford a large place like this anywhere else. Besides this, there were small compensations like the nearness of my father's office, my school, the post office. Of the few educated bhadralok in this neighbourhood, my father was certainly one. Most of our neighbours were either milk merchants or worked in paan plantations. They never mixed with us...probably wondered 'what the hell are they doing here!'

Having written this far he stopped. No. This wasn't right. He was not saying anything about how he got there in the first place. He had foggy memories of life before The Alley. He remembered his father as a minor government official, busy in settling land disputes, living a gypsy life, transferred from station to station. The most important pieces of furniture in their house were the large wooden crates...that sometimes became their bed, or served as chairs or as tables! At that time the district towns were metamorphosing from sleepy villages to cities. The land offices would be teeming with crowds all the time. Amongst all this, my father would sit on a raised dais, surrounded by wooden rails, lord of all he surveyed.

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
Would there be a shadow of his earlier life if he began thus? He could Would there be a simulation with the could not be sure. A fragment of his father's life, also his. Having thus chopped not be sure. A fragment of head he had no idea what to do with a up his life like slices of bread, he had no idea what to do with the crumbs

> Father left his government job in the prime of his life. to join an international organization he had helped begin. Leaving a life of pen-pushing behind, he submerged himself in study. Having sloughed off the 'gazetted' life, he was a visibly relieved man, who soared like a bird. He was always busy working till late at night, though I had no idea what about. There was a stream of visitors from abroad, and mother would be busy cooking and improvising meals for them. Forbidden from talking to them, we would stare at our visitors through the windows just as our neighbours used, to with us. I remember staying at a palatial government house called 'Hawa Khana' where a man would visit us on horseback, and send us platters full of sweets. I began to realize the notion of our separateness, right from that time.

He paused at this point...probably he was talking too much about his father. Where was his mother, in all this? She was the one person who had given up on almost everything, to bring them up. There was something missing in the picture. It was strange that Mother's memories came to him in this context of pain. Fragments of the daily business of living flooded his mind....salt and spice, rations, shoes, clothes, school lunches, fetching water from the tube well, sunning clothes on the terrace, huddling around the coal fire in winters....One memory among this welter of images shone brilliantly:

Grappling with the intricacies of English grammar and tenses, while sitting on a mat, under the light of a single naked bulb; and his mother gently correcting him from the near darkness of the kitchen, where she sat everyday making chapattis. 'Have been', 'shall have been', 'have had been' coalesced with the smoke and drifted around, only to stop near his mother's aanchal...from a distance she seemed so unfamiliar and strange.

If he were to begin his autobiography from birth, then it was inevitable that his mother and her home would figure in his story. His grandfather was a doctor, an eye specialist, with a successful practice in Bhowanipur in It. Bhowanipur, in Kolkata....the place where he was born. His grandfather died on the day he was b on the day he was born...whether there was any connection between these two events of high and the second the second two events of high and th two events of birth and death, he did not know. But this incident changed

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his mother deeply. He had no memory of visiting that house in his early his mount that nouse in his early childhood. He could only remember the large, winding staircase to the first floor, and its twisting walls filled with sombre, dark-framed mildewy, mothfloor, and yellowing black and white photographs of dead people. People eaten and years are did not know. In the long corridor upstairs, broken almirahs, shuttered he did not bison horns, framed alta-smeared footprints of dead relatives, windows, bison horns, framed alta-smeared footprints of dead relatives, windows, but dead relatives, dead fish floating in aquariums—he had never been able to forget the deep dead fish and apprehension this have sense of dread and apprehension this house evoked in him.

Everything is held together between memory and dreams. It may have been possible to remember a few dreams; but those, which made no sense to him, he forgot. It occurred to him that if he could split his life into temporal segments, into little frames, like 8 to 12, 12 to 16, 16 to 32, and 32 and above, then maybe it would make his task a little easier. This was something like looking at oneself in a fragmented vision of 'My Childhood,' 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man', 'From the Varanasi of my Fading Years' and so on. But even that seemed fake and pretentious to him. The people who live and have their being in these works seemed feelingless and false, like characters in a poorly written story. They were like puppets, always manipulated by the author....Everything begins from the experiences of childhood. The sunrise at dawn, gradually gained brilliance at its zenith in his youth. The wisdom of his life would slowly immerse itself in the darkness as the semi-circular sun set. Another journey was about to begin. The end would contain another beginning. Childhood would be reclaimed in old age; a new consciousness would be born again.

As a child, he had witnessed an amazing sunrise on the seashore. In the near-darkness of dawn, the sun like an egg-yolk slipping out of a white eggshell had emerged out of the blue waters. And right then, he had remembered tales of Sindbad the Sailor and the Arabian Nights. That was the first time they had all gone out together, his first taste of travel. That was an unforgettable moment; somewhere he could start writing from. Maybe like this:

> As soon as the Puja break began, we left for our holidays. Like my Grandfather, my father had the reputation of being a stick-in-the-mud. He had seen very little of the world outside his books. But I was very curious to see the worlds of oceans, forests, mountains and people hidden in his large books. The moment came when our house physician almost forced him to take a holiday. Even mother accompanied us, though unwillingly. I still remember a blue van carried us away that day, through a forest....

> > Asim Rej / 67

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
The blue van reminded him of going to school, the scuffling horn, prayers in the school yard, sirens in the The blue van reminded raucousness, the blaring horn, prayers in the school yard, sirens in the long the way the blackboard would appear through raucousness, the blaiming norm, in the long silent afternoons, the way the blackboard would appear through the long classes. He would have four slices of bread Headmaster's solemn glasses. He would have four slices of bread, a boiled

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Ma had all of us, children, admitted to a missionary school. Schooldays would pass in a haze of strict discipline. The school, next to the church, lay immersed in a hushed silence. In the afternoon, nuns in their white habits and coloured umbrellas walked silently under the shade of the eucalyptus trees. From my classroom window I could see the church steeple, and a huge brass bell hanging underneath.

On top of the bell were marble angels, frozen in flight. And it was exactly at that moment of gazing that he felt trapped in this cage.

He was always behind in the grades-race at school. He would get tangled up in the webs of numbers and decimals in arithmetic, lose his war among the red, blue, yellow, green lines of snaking rivers and strange lands in Geography, or wander around in the maze of dates and events of History...into a land of dreams.

He always had been blessed with a poor memory. Today would be a foggy memory tomorrow. Only once he surprised everybody by reciting, from memory, a 10-line poem. As a reward, he had been presented with Abanindranath Tagore's Rajkahini, a book he still had in the glass almirah.

As he leapt from strand to strand, a joint snapped....Suddenly, memories of SKC, their NCC teacher. SKC's brilliant personality, the way he spoke, walked, his ideals, his life-affirming interest in everything from games to studies...had touched him deeply. The nooks and corners of the school were full of SKC's stories. But to everybody's shock, he killed himself suddenly, one day. We could find no reason for this, with our simple understanding of the world. He went away leaving a lonely life and a room filled with a few trousers and half shirts, a navy blue coat, a velvet hat, empty cigarette packs on the table, old bus tickets, stacks of magazines, loose change and a diary filled with sketches of trees, birds and animals, people.

Like a character in a novel, Sukomalkanti Chakrabarty or SKC discontinuo appeared from his life one day. It became hard to remember him in a school group photograph, by the end of the year. Who was this Sukomalkand, who indeed was a subject to the subject tof who indeed were these Sukomalkantis who came and faded out of his memories? He can be a lample of the year. Who was this sukomalkantis who came and faded out of his memories? He can be a lample of the year. memories? He could not hold on to anyone; the loss of one Sukomalkanti signalled the beginning signalled the beginning of a search through the blind alleys, and by-lanes

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of a thousand names. But Sukomalkanti was lost forever. Glamorous, happy, smiling models beckoned to him from billboards and posters; even car steering wheels, wrist-watch straps, expensive Sharp pens called to him. He would peer intensely at their eyes, glasses, beard, looking for a flash of recognition, but Sukomalkanti remained distant and strange to him.

He felt a spiritual kinship with the red-brick L-shaped house, where they had lived almost fifteen years. There was a long courtyard in that three-roomed house, which they used as a playground. But perhaps the most interesting thing about the house was its large, open roof from where one could see the local trains pass in the distance, through the coconut groves. The passing of those trains marked the passage of time, throughout the day. The other timekeepers were radio programs, factory sirens and the church bell. He remembered also how the tin weathercock on top of his father's office showed the way the wind blew. The fleeting vision of a shooting star, or the rapid traversing of a satellite across the night-sky, or Orion rising, deepened the mysteries of the cosmos. The sound of Rabindrasangeet being sung next door, every evening: "Skies foil of sun and stars, the world brimming with life..." would remind him of Amrakunja, of dance, music and theatre underneath open skies.

He wondered who had named this cultural forum in his father"s office; was it Rabindranath himself? Surrounding the stage were innumerable trees, both indigenous and foreign. The fragrance of flowers in bloom and the riot of colours from the Mango, Neem, Kadam, Bakul and many more unknown species made the place very special. Little doll-like girls wearing garlands danced, moving their soft hands delicately. And the plays staged by the elders would go on all night long. And at dawn, almost every day, he would steal a few roses for a young girl, and stand alone, near the corner, waiting for her. He felt an irresistible attraction towards this girl, the only one who could speak English fluently. She lived on the second floor, at the western end of a palatial mansion with Greek columns, and would emerge periodically to take a walk on the balcony. That was his only fleeting glimpse of this girl, who flitted from room to room like a butterfly. They were allowed inside that house only once a year: during the Rasajatra. It was dreamlike—the chiaroscuro of multi-coloured glasses over the doorways, ^a milk-white stairway, delicate, small chandeliers casting a magical glow, sparks flashing in the silver lamp stand...all this seemed more like a Hemen Majumdar painting rather than reality. It was at times like this that their home in the dark alley seemed very attractive, and he would be the first to protest, vehemently, at the idea of moving.

He paused to consider whether he could begin his story from this point; maybe call it 'The Butterfly's Dream'. But the place where he wanted

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation. Constant was actually an ending. Like a giant smashing a dollhouse, their house of memories was gone, one day, suddenly, when a truck came and whisked of memories was gone, on the city. To a brand new 1200 square-foot them away to the fringe of the city. To a brand new 1200 square-foot apartment. They felt like characters in a movie in this dazzling flat. He would run his fingers over the grille work, the newly polished doors and the dazzling tiles and feel their newness. Everything felt strangely new: plastic tuberose in vases, porcelain angels, sylvan rivers fluttering in calendars, the cuckoo which emerged every hour from the clock....

His life changed from this point. This rise in their status meant casting away of their old life; and embracing the new one. In the meanwhile Father went twice to Europe, bringing back with him Picasso's prints, the Ninth Symphony recordings, 30 volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica, German plays and French poetry. For him there was a wooden box with an engraved lid; open it and music would flow out!! Their identity was now as residents of Block-B, Flat 2 of New Age Apartment. Father and Mother's names were embossed on a brass nameplate. A uniformed durwan would open the gates. Mr. Dasgupta, the Roys and the Natarajans would take in the evening breeze on the terrace. The wives would sit around knitting sweaters and talk about their children, their homework, the school curriculum and TV. Birthdays, marriages, annaprashan. and deaths would punctuate the flow of their lives. He wrote:

> Mr. Sen, our only family friend and a wonderful sciencefiction writer, had no peer in flowing flowers. Animadi, in the next flat, sang bhajans beautifully. A boy from C block surprised everyone by standing seventh in the Higher Secondary Exams. Rita, who lived at no. 10, won an award in swimming. Mr. Sengupta's huge Alsatian caught a convict one night. Father was made the Chairman of the Housing Society. Our identity stemmed from our Earner's.

At this point he realized that his own identity had not really been established. Who was he? With that question in mind he went up to the roof. Memories flooded him... playing Baghbondi games on a madur on their large, airy roof, mock battles with branches as weapons, the sound of pos and pans being scrubbed in the courtyard, the whirring monotone of a motor, Ma shouting at someone, hot rotis puffing up over a fire, the moon in the well, death lurking in the slimy floors. He tries to see the past through the present, and the now through then; from the roof he could see the trains pass—but they were electric, not steam-powered. The skyline was a gridwork of antennas and clotheslines. Artificial plants on the staircase, water dripping

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from a tap, the sound of kitchen mixers, television noise from neighbouring from a tap, these would coalesce and rise to pause at their balcony. All the flats—an to English-medium schools. Several blue school-vans would children went to English-medium schools. Several blue school-vans would children working to pick them up. The schisms, the anomalies were more obvious to his eyes than any harmonies, patterns of similarities. In this crowd of faces and countless, disjointed happenings, there wasn't any place where he could begin an enquiry into his world and life.

What could he say about his rather simple and unremarkable life that would amaze other people? He found the attempt to look at himself as a gaudily dressed king in jatra both artificial and outlandish. Neither could he find anyone whose life could inspire him. To be honest, he had no pride about his lineage. He had left behind a crumbling two hundred year-old legacy of his forefathers in an anonymous village in Burdwan, which sank in the floods every year. The only memento his Grandfather had carried with him to their home in Kolkata were a sword and a shield. They were supposed to have been kshatriyas of the Surya clan, traditionally warriors. He had found all this in the history books. History was his favourite field of enquiry, though he couldn't remember since when his fascination began. His first book was Todd's History of Rajasthan. The desire to travel to exotic and foreign lands was born at about that time. The sweeping landscapes, rugged castles and princely palaces, the sun setting behind silhouetted camels, sand dunes rising and falling like waves: all this he had seen in countless calendars. It was easy for him to visualise any scenario from this, and in fact he felt a fleeting pride in his tenuous connection to all this. Once his Grandfather had said that their family had directly descended from Maan Singh.

Apart from reading, his obsession was travelling. He would disappear from home suddenly to wander through forests, mountains and seashores; he would walk miles to follow a river to its source. Nobody had been able to cure him of this eccentricity. Mother had often pleaded with him, saying: "Son, come home. How long are you going to wander around?" But to return home was not his fate. Everything in his life was awry, in halfmeasures. He gravitated towards History while studying Physics, left learning the sitar midway, the Ghalib translation left incomplete...several scraps of Paper filled with mathematical equations and lines of poetry, his favourite toses withered away, the broken-legged table with its gaping drawer, the ragged trousers and jackets hanging like dead men. In his shirt pocket were many scraps of paper with numbers, names and addresses. Who were these people? Try as he might he could not remember anything about them. This forgetfulness had become a habit with him. Or was he trying to deliberately forget all that was unpleasant? He had learnt to erase with ease the mundane happenings and the procession of faces that crowded his life and had indeed

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changed him from within. In his dreams he saw once-familiar faces, but changed him trom within. In the remained ephemeral and distant. Shard-like fragments of incidents, they remained ephemeral feelings flashed like images in the minutes of incidents. fragments of people and feelings flashed like images in the mirror of his mind. Inconsistent, random and incomplete.

The strains of an old song "Purano shei diner katha..." playing on a FM channel, drifted in from the next room. He was seized by an intense nostalgia, a yearning for the life that had passed by, for old friends and relations, old and yellowy letters, diaries, magazines, useless old pens, timepieces, and spectacles—a past he had not been able to let go of. Antiques held an intense attraction for him; for his last birthday Grandmother had presented him a Victorian silver pen stand.

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A stray sound, a casually uttered word, a photograph or the smell of a familiar perfume wafting by would be enough to propel him into the past, and from one incident to another, from one time to another—as if he were in a tunnel. He felt he was going round and round an infinite circle, from which he had no respite.

A large group photograph hung on the wall—a family portrait of his Father, Mother, and all his siblings. Maybe he could start his story from this photo...the trials and tribulations, the rises and falls of this family-his brother's departure to foreign lands, his sister's marriage, Mother's illness the disposing away of their ancestral property in that faraway village, all those old, forgotten tales; and also about the objects that filled their livesthe small round table in the corner, the cane armchair, the double door dresser or the ceiling fan with the peeling paint, or the sombre stillness of Grandfather's overcoat hanging quietly, or the tablecloth that Grandma made with her own hands. All these things had stories of their own, as had the bric-a-brac in the large trunks-from rusting flashlights to copper coin amulets.

Maybe he could begin anew like this:

Our house was infamous for its addas and its endless rounds of tea. Almost everyday an argument would break out, around the dinner table, from politics to sports. Arguments that sometimes almost came to fisticuffs! In this heated atmosphere was born our fiercely individualist personalities, our own convictions-Father's stream-of-consciousness novel, my elder brother's original set designs, Chhorda's allusions to trees and women in his paintings, the persistent melancholia in my poetry. On holidays the roof of our house would be filled with the sound of human voices singing, and of poetry being read aloud. The boy from next door would come and play the violin sometimes....Its

sad melodies would linger on long after, till late at night, hanging on to the leaves of the money plant, in the little blue flowers, in the windowpanes and curtains, in the bed, pillows, ashtray and cigarette smoke. Ma would wipe her eyes staring out of the windows. At moments like these I would have the feeling that the mystery of life was too ineffable and too vast for anyone of us to fully comprehend.

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Having written so far he stopped and looked towards the corner where an old guitar lay gathering dust. A distant uncle had brought that, from abroad, as a present for Ma. She had learnt to play it for a while, before she fell ill. An intense sadness gripped her at all times. From that day nobody had touched it, and it stood in that corner for years....In the showcase next to it were old photos of Father going abroad, next to that was a model of a rocket, Sartre's Age of Reason, a few cassettes of contemporary Bengali music. On the wall was a large 20" by 20" print of a mermaid, scattering flowers while flying away.

In the mermaid's face he tries to see the women he has known, women who came into his life and then disappeared. He still did not know what love was. Why did these women keep coming back, he wondered. One woman, a Syrian Christian, another a photographer, and yet another from a fading aristocracy. A woman who was on the verge of killing herself had come back to him in the hope of a home. The strange lives of these strange women could also go on to constitute a chapter in his autobiography. But all these stories remain unwritten; a deep sense of uninspiration and ennui engulfs him. He was sometimes reminded of a friend to whom he wrote all these secret thoughts.

He would sometimes drive to the Ganga ghats, and would lie on the grassy verges for hours, singing to himself. He would sometimes wonder as how he had forged a friendship with such a frank, obdurate, sensitive person who was his opposite in nature. He had come like a storm, and departed equally abruptly. He had last met him at the Mall in Darjeeling, about ten years ago. Wearing a pair of jeans, a striped red and black pullover and a fur cap he was looking at the distant valley through the telescope at the Lookout Point. He had not changed a bit—the same sharp, smart intelligent manner of talking! Quoting from one of his own poems he had disappeared into the mists, never to appear again.

Many others had come and gone, like him, leaving a void behind. Small and unremarkable incidents glowed like icons in his mind. He kept a journal of these events and non-events. Special incidents—births, marriages and deaths were given special mention in red ink. Congratulations, greetings

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Children days. Perhaps, these were the

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He had no clear idea of the real meaning of life. Time passes, people to assert his existence he would stay the way they are. In order to assert his existence he would refurbish stay the way they are. In order the room, change the curtains or the furniture, even his small room—paint the room, change the paintings happing on the the flower vase; sometimes change the paintings hanging on the walls of late, he had acquired a taste for photography and listening to music. Every now and then, he would leave home at the crack of dawn, carrying his huge camera to the streets of the city, rediscovering her and her citizens, anew. Probably, he mused, the curious experiences of being a photographer would be a good place to start his writings. His first photograph was taken on the day of their Grihapravesh. He ran the scene through once again like a film reel:

> ... there was a great coming together of friends and relatives, all united in their happiness. Barho Pishi brought along a sackful of fish from the village, his Delhi aunt wandered from room to room, trailed by her dolled-up daughter; Sejda went out and got a gramo disc of sitarshehnai jugalbandi. After years, all the rugs and carpets Mother had collected saw the light of day; the smell of naphthalene hung over their flat. A framed wedding photo of Father and Mother was placed on top of the showcase. All the curtains were touched by a light rosy hue. The light, brilliant and diffused, was reflected and refracted a thousand times by the chandelier.

He remembered his mother sitting down on an easy chair, tired and exhausted, while he went from room to room clicking away. In the shadowy corner of one room, behind a door stood a young girl, like a frozen piece of sculpture."

A distant relative had brought this girl to their house, to help in the housework. Mother brought her up almost like her own daughter—bathing her, combing and tying a ribbon in her hair. Mother also loved to teach her to read and write, to buy her new clothes or anything she fancied. Surprisingly, inspite of all this, the girl disappeared one day. Neither could the police track her down. One fine day, she suddenly appeared at their doors doorway, wearing a yellow sari and with *sindoor* on her forehead. She told Mother the story of her life and the reason for her disappearance: Mother listened with to a sensider listened with tears glistening in her eyes. At this point he stopped to consider if this was not if this was not a part of his autobiography too. However, he also felt that the story of his use the story of his life was being replaced by the stories of other people; one sequence was fall. sequence was fading into another....sometimes in close-up, and again in long

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shot and then all mixed-up in a montage. At a point he had considered making a film on his life, but like most things he planned to do, he never could quite get round to doing it. He had thought of beginning it with the death of the protagonist...the body of an unidentified youth is found on the streets at dawn. The story would be a gradual unraveling of the mystery behind his death and more importantly, his identity.

He pulls out Nirad C. Choudhury's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* from the book-shelf; he cannot read beyond a few pages, and closes the book shut. An immense affection and attachment to the Bengali language had kept him a true Bengali all these years; nothing had changed in him. He would fumble over the knife and fork, or the tie-knot and sometimes mispronounce familiar words. He would be out of sorts at parties and social occasions. But this is not what he had wanted to do with his life. He had other plans for himself. But nothing had worked out eventually. He left student politics, joined with a friend to publish a magazine; that too came to a halt one day, as they ran out of money. He enrolled for a degree in Journalism, worked for an advertisement agency for a while, designed sets for theatre groups, and finally gravitated towards a 9-to-5 government job.

The incident to leave the deepest scar on his mind was his father's sudden death. The responsibility of the family came to rest upon him. Father's death really broke Mother and she was bedridden for the rest of her life. From this point, he seemed to have lost all control over his life and his destiny. This, he realized, was a place as good as any to end his autobiography. Then again, this was also a point to begin his story. He looked up towards the fading, peeling walls to see a large, laminated photograph of his father. Father was smiling faintly, his face filled with a deep serenity.

Translated from Bengali by Koushik Sarkar

Asim Rej / 75

Do They, Uncle?

Kalyan Majumdar

After a three-week trip, he has returned from London only this morning When he left, he was under a spell: daydreaming and intensely excited. All that is over now, only recollections of the happy moments ripple through him. Memories of a few days in an alien society, an amazing fairytale country, have been bubbling in his mind. Yet, he feels rather low. As he pushes the pleasant memories to the backburner, he closes his eyes and tries to restrain a sigh.

He even wonders if he actually visited London! He hadn't dream such a thing even in his wildest flights of fancy. But it's a fact that Titu had flown in a Boeing and was treated rather like a king by lovely airhostesses, who seemed to be from another world. Titu Shome, who lives in a stinking, claustrophobic Abdullah Lane, is an international artiste today.

It can only be explained as fortuitous, as a sheer stroke of good luck! Otherwise, why would Hamid Sahib fall ill at that precise time? The welknown artistes who belonged to the next level were in Moscow then. Therefore, the Bangla adage 'At times, a milk pot hung from the ceiling breaks lose to benefit the cat' proved true at least once, and the young folk singer Titu Shome climbed the stairs of an aircraft on his way to participate in a programme organised by the Commonwealth. Cultural Society. He waved as he climbed, and slipped into a plush seat rather like an emperor. A minor earthquake rocked his heart for some time, but his mind was lit up by scintillating fireworks.

This morning, he walked down the same staircase. From the pictures of film stars and other VIPs in newspapers, Titu had gathered that waving was an integral part of boarding (or getting off) an aircraft. But as no beautiful heroine came to welcome him back, he got a little confused. He was also troubled by a faint sense of inexplicable uneasiness. And then, like

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light stealing through a fence made of matted bamboo shavings, a thought flashed through his mind. If Jhumur had come to the airport...

Jhumur is not his girlfriend in the conventional sense of the term. Rather, she's been a good friend since childhood. They share a pleasant relationship of affection, love and leg-pulling, and pick up fights at the slightest pretext. He could also marry her without thinking twice. But even then, she was not his girlfriend. And she happens to be the only girl he knows closely.

The moment he thinks of Jhumur, his mother, *boudi*, and Tua fleet into his vision. Tua is the only daughter of boudi and his late elder brother. Did he forget them till now? Even Tua? No, he couldn't have. As he roamed the bright London streets and walked into dazzling departmental stores, he thought of them time and again. How could one forget one's own extended self?

After leaving the immigration counter, as he converted the British pounds – saved through considerable self-denial – into Indian rupees, a thorn of uneasiness continued to trouble him. But soon, he felt happy: the taxi fare to his house was almost twice of what he had spent for the same journey in the other direction. These days, prices go up as quickly as a Boeing, except for the price of human lives.

When he reaches their door, he imitates a bird's call, like he always does, "Tu-u-u-i! Tu-u-u-i!"

Almost instantaneously, Tua, who looks like a doll he had seen in the Piccadilly Circus, rushes out. Her face is flushed with an ocean of happiness ...only a four-year-old can smile so beautifully. She claps and shouts in her flutelike voice, "Ma-a-a! Kaku phire esechhe. Ma! Thamma! Kaku has come back, kaku has come!"

Even as she calls her mother and grandmother, Tua flings herself on Titu. He swings her in the air and takes her in his arms. Even as he hugs Tua and smells her hair, he says, "How were you darling? You didn't make any mischief, did you?"

Tua's pink cheeks turns red, "I won't talk to you. Do I make mischief the time?"

So Titu picks her up again and holding her cheek against his, says, No, never. You are a darling! You are a bird. You never make a mischief, you don't know how to."

When he walks into the house with Tua in his arms, his mother greets him. He puts down Tua and touches mother's feet, "Are you all right, Ma?" As he says this, he notices that mother looked rather pale. Is something wrong with her? She touches his head and mumbles a blessing. Perhaps she hetself doesn't know what exactly she says to bless him. She says, "Are you all right?"

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

As he brings in his suitcase and handbag from the veranda, boudi walks in from within, wiping her hand with the end of her sari.

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A surge of pain wells up within Titu as he faces her; a harsh frosty A surge of pain went of wind blows through the cavity of his chest. Since his brother died in a train wind blows through the cavity of his chest. Since his brother died in a train wind blows through the carry ago, this lively, joyous young woman has become a faded, sepia picture of her past. Even then, at times, she used to reveal herself, but after her only brother was murdered last year under mysterious circumstances, she has withdrawn herself totally. Her brother had been a successful doctor. And her parents had died even before her marriage. Titu often thinks that boudi considers herself a burden on the family. Perhaps she thinks that as she has nowhere to go, she's been forcing herself upon an unwilling Titu. He wants to tell her: You are not a burden, boudi. You are as much a part of this home as Ma is. Your daughter is as much yours as much dada's, as she's mine.

Although he has thought it, he has never managed to express his feelings in words. In fact, he can't summon the courage to tell her anything He is scared he might hurt her without knowing. It would be awful if she felt he pitied her. Besides, how could he say: it's my duty to look after vou and Tua! Only a successful career could have given him the confidence to say things like that, but even an apology of a career looks like a chimera now.

"How are you, thakurpo? How did you enjoy the trip?"

Titu bends down to touch her feet, as he always does. Bould says, "Oh!

No", and steps back.

This is an old game between the two of them. She is only marginally older, and doesn't allow Titu to touch her feet. Since her first days in their family, she used to say, "What nonsense! How can I let such a big brotherin-law touch my feet?" She used to say this and affectionately catch hold of Titu's shock of hair and shake him.

The simple gesture conveyed much; it drowned Titu in such a surge of affection and tenderness that he repeated the trick again and again,

although he knew she wouldn't let him touch her feet.

But today, boudi doesn't pull his hair. The absence of this childish playacting hurts Titu as if he were actually a child; a shadow of gloom fleets across his eyes. But he quickly composes himself and says jovially, "I enjoyed a great deal, boudi. Had a real good time. Don't you see, I've put on so much weight?"

In the mean time, Tua has started to swing merrily, holding on to Titu's arm. She says, "Rubbish, you haven't put on any weight. If you have," where's your reasons and the says, "Rubbish, you haven't put on any weight.

where's your paunch?"

Titu laughs, Ma too shares the joke. Boudi's eyes smile, but the lines of her face don't change.

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The question drowns Titu in happy recollections. He has become a professional singer because of *boudi*. But for her, he would never have gone to England. Does she know how grateful he is? Neither his parents nor elder brother wanted him to take up music, that too folk music, as a career. They were convinced it would be a useless pursuit. Later, elder brother they were convinced but insisted. "If you have to take up music, they are to take up music, they were brother brother they were convinced but insisted."

They were convinced it would be a discless pursuit. Later, elder brother changed his mind but insisted, "If you have to take up music as a career, learn classical music or the songs of Rabindranath. What's great about straining your vocal chords to sing the shrill notes of bhatiali?"

Eight years ago, immediately after her marriage, *boudi* offered a counterpoint. "He should sing what he can, and what he likes. After all, folk music is our real tradition. It would be a great achievement to master folk music."

She convinced not only dada, but also Baba. And later, whenever Titu came home late after rehearsals or programmes, boudi always waited for him, however late he might have been. After every programme, she used to ask him how he had done. Time and again she told him, "Keep trying. Don't give up; don't listen to the critics! Some day, you'll be a famous singer." Presently, her question wipes out whatever childish hurt he felt. He says excitedly, "I performed very well, boudi. I even did a programme on the BBC. Their newspapers praised me a lot. I've brought all the clippings, I'll show you."

Titu could clearly notice a pleasant sense of happiness floating up from deep within her, and lighting up her face.

Tua says, as if she has suddenly remembered it, "Kaku, have you brought my doll?"

Titu gave her a kiss and said, "Yes darling, I have."

A little later, after changing, he opens his suitcase. When he gives Tua the talking doll purchased with five precious pounds, happiness gushes out of her like a perennial fountain. Titu feels nothing else could give him such sublime pleasure.

As he takes out the other things, he recalls that while window-shopping in Oxford Street, he thought he would have bought a nice sari for boudi had dada been alive. Boudi had been exceedingly fond of wearing good clothes. And she looked gorgeous when she decked herself up: she looked like a woman straight out of the poetry of Kalidasa. But in the Ptesent circumstances, Titu couldn't decide what he should buy for the same Petson, and in the end, bought a sewing kit and some designs for embroidery. Boudi is fond of doing needlework. He couldn't easily figure out what he could bring for Ma either, and settled for a nice woollen blouse.

Ma could use it in the next winter. Titu couldn't afford to buy too

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri many things. From out of his earning from the TV channel and what he meaore daily allowance, nothing much was been much was to be meaore. many things. From our of many things much was left after and a pair of trousers for himself much was left after he had bought a shirt and a pair of trousers for himself, two frocks for Ihumur. He had dreamt of himself, two frocks for Ihumur. Tua, and some cosmetics for Jhumur. He had dreamt of buying a tape Tua, and some cosmodor. He just cannot bridge the perennial unfathomable gulf between yearning and ability.

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In the afternoon, when he had had his lunch, he felt he shouldn't have spent so much. He could have sold the British pounds in the black market

here and made a tidy packet. He badly needs money.

He decides to sleep for a long stretch. He had hardly slept in the aircraft. How could anyone sleep in a plane? Perhaps those who flew regularly got used to it. He too had felt drowsy after dinner. But soon, the deferred wants of everyday life started crowding his head...there was no question of sleeping...the aircraft—Piccadilly Circus—the Tube—Soho— Thames: everything got wiped off his consciousness. The everyday struggle to keep alive, just to hang on ... and the desperate need to support Ma boudi and Tua, filled him completely. First, Father passed away. Dada followed soon. Now he has to carry the whole family on his fragile shoulders. His studies came to an inevitable dead end after a run-of-themill graduation. Although he tried desperately, he couldn't find a job. He has just been hanging on thanks to his vocal chords. He survives, and takes care of the family with the pittance he gets from radio stations, musical soirees and music tuitions. Can this be called taking care of a family? He is alive because he breathes. He feels the greatest tragedy of life is that one has to go on living even when one doesn't want to!

Ma said nothing. And boudi never complains. But it is clear to Tim that these three weeks have been extremely hard for them. As he had to leave suddenly, he couldn't leave behind much cash. And he had to forego the income he would have earned had he been here. Titu even suspects whether they had two square meals every day. And, as he found out in the

taxi, prices have gone up even within these three weeks.

A little later, when he was pulling Tua's legs, Ma came in with an embarrassed look on her face. As she didn't say anything, Titu asked, "Do you want to tell me something, Ma?"

She replied in a low voice laced with guilt, "Do you have some cash

on you? There is no rice in the house."

Titu congratulates himself for selling the British currency at the airport And regrets that he didn't tighten his belt further and save a few more pounds. But fortunately, he has something for Mal

Tua cannot manage without rice. Quite some time ago, they started rotis for sure in the eating rotis for supper in order to cut costs. At times, they eat rotis in the

afternoon too. They cannot afford to cook rice twice only for Tua. But the moment she sees rotis on her plate, she starts yelling, she refuses to eat them. Boudi loses her cool and thrashes her. Tua cries even more loudly. And she falls asleep when she is tired of crying. If Titu is at home, she sleeps in the comfort of his proximity.

Boudi says, "You are the one who spoils her by pampering too

much."

A helpless Titu says, "It is not a question of spoiling her, the point is that I am unable to offer even a little rice to this small child. And perhaps to cover up the shame, I indulge in what you call pampering her!" After a short while, he adds, "If you want to beat someone, please beat me. I am the culprit."

His embarrassed sister-in-law says, "Please do not talk rubbish. What

more can you do, all alone?"

"It is not a question of doing more or less, boudi. Rather, doing what is necessary. But everything is going awry, we are just not able to control things. And because of that, we are beating the innocent child. We are not able to attack the real cause." The pungent taste of these stray thoughts makes Titu bitter. The bright, colourful memories of three weeks become dusty and drab. The days he left behind in London seem to be absurd dreams. Why the hell did he agree to go? Fame doesn't fill anyone's stomach. If only he got a job with a steady salary instead of this futile struggle in the musical world! But who would offer him a job? Much more qualified people are roaming around for a job. Titu's throat becomes dry in helpless anger.

"Titu-da-a-a!" Jhumur enters with happiness brimming in her voice. Her lissom body brings in a stream of sunlight in the frosty darkness of Titu's mind.

Jhumur says excitedly, "As soon as I came from college, I heard you have come back and I came running. How were you, Titu-da? How did you find the place?

Titu had stretched himself in his father's ancient easy chair. He straightened his back.

"I was fine and I enjoyed. How are you all?"

"Fine, except for Baba's health. He's not well."

"Is he? I'll go and look him up in the evening. Please sit down, I have things for you."

Jhumur furrows her brow and seems hurt, "The things won't run

away. Have I come to collect my gifts?"

Titu's face betrays helplessness, "What nonsense! Shouldn't you see if fastidiousness."

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Boudi walks in with a cup of tea. Seeing Jhumur, she asks, "When

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ou come, Jilulia. "Just now. Please sit down, *boudi*. Let's hear from Titu-da what he saw in England."

"Wait, I'll bring a cup of tea for you."

When boudi leaves, Jhumur says, "What all did you see, Titu-da?"

Titu suddenly feels like pulling Jhumur's legs. It's great fun to annoy her. Says he, "I saw so many sexy girls. And unlike you, they aren't wrapped up completely in clothes, they don't look like rolled up beds. Oh! What legs what breasts! And the scenes one comes across in tube stations or the Hyde Park! Films in real life, and absolutely uncensored!

Jhumur looks daggers at him, "Did you go to London only to see women? You men are so uncivilized!"

Boudi enters with another cup of tea. She hands over the tea to Jhumur and sits down on a low stool. Jhumur and Titu don't feel stiff when bould is around, so the banter goes on.

She asks Jhumur, "What was he saying?"

Ihumur complains, "Your brother-in-law has become such a lout. He was saving he had only seen girls in London, and all of them were scantily dressed!"

Boudi smiles sweetly. Titu is secretly delighted to see her smiling. Then she said seriously, "This is very unfair, Thakurpo. You aren't supposed to look at any girl other than Ihumur."

"Boudi," says Jhumur in mock anger, "I must leave."

Both Titu and boudi breaks into a loud guffaw and Jhumur is even more embarrassed. To overcome that, she says, "What is London like, Titu-da? Please be serious, don't make fun of me."

Titu looks at Jhumur intently. She has been blushing, but her eyes are still with genuine curiosity. Over time, Jhumur has become quite a beauty. Titu finishes his tea and puts down the cup. He says thoughtfully, "What can London be like? After all, a city is a city."

"Is it like our city?"

"How can it be? Just as people from our villages are amazed to see Kolkata, when we go from here, we are amazed to see London or Paris Compared to London or New York, our cities are like villages."

Jhumur doesn't quite get the drift. She says, "What do you mean?

Titu smiles. He wants to tell her, they look so glamorous because they What nonsense are you talking?" exploited the colonies. Their apple-like cheeks and the red gloss on their

lips have been earned at the cost of blood and sweat of Asia and Africa. lips have been says, "Forget it. I'll But he knows it was pointless to discuss all these. He says, "Forget it. I'll tell you something else."

Titu shakes off the bitterness that had built up within. He starts talking about the Piccadilly Circus, the British Museum, the Tower of London, about the following solution, and other places. Titu had read a few tourist guides. With that, he adds snatches of details from his own experience.

When he is talking about the change of guards at the Buckingham Palace, Tua comes in, just awake, rubbing her eyes. She walks in slowly and parks herself comfortably in Titu's lap. She listens intently, as if he was telling

Boudi asks, "How does it feel to fly in an aircraft?"

The question puzzles Titu, he can't offer an answer easily. When he took the plane for the first time, he was shaken by an almost implausible excitement. How could he express that wonderful feeling in words? He recalls that while returning too, he went through something that was way beyond the realm of sensory experiences. The plane took off from Frankfurt towards Kuwait. It was a non-stop flight for six and a half hours. After dinner, the cabin lights had been dimmed so that the passengers could sleep. An enormous stillness filled up the huge aircraft. The muted light within the aircraft created a surreal atmosphere as billions of stars lit up the sky outside. The earth below had vanished. The steady, bee-like drone of the engine sounded like a message from another world.

Titu gets engrossed in recounting his tales. He feels a subliminal flow of emotions deep within himself. A throng of dreamlike imaginations gather before his eyes. If that aircraft had never landed...if life had been an unending journey to nowhere.... If he didn't have to come down to the everyday exchanges of a drab world, if he didn't have to stretch himself to the limit to fight wants, frustrations and agonies. If he could once again reach the sky, higher, and still higher...crossing the limits of stars, constellations and galaxies, somewhere far away, to a different universe in search of new life...to a life that was absolutely different. If he could cross the boundaries of imagination and reach a blue, forlorn world that is not invaded by a hungry, violent civilization.

While he is talking, Tua tries to attract his attention a couple of times, by calling him "Kaku!" But Titu has been in a different world. He doesn't remember he is sitting in a ramshackle old chair in a shabby room. Boudi and Jhumur too have been sharing Titu's excitement. Unconsciously, they too have become Titu's companions in an impossible journey. Their room has turned into a spacecraft that is exploring the limits of reality.

An impatient Tua grabs Titu's head with both hands and turns him towards her. She asks loudly, "Kaku, do they eat rice twice a day?"

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
At that point, there is an enormous explosion somewhere. The At that point, there are boundary between the earth and the sky disappears, and all the silence of the eyes of Tip. the universe invades their tiny room. Before the eyes of Titu, boudi and Jhumur, time rocks to and fro like a cobra that is about to strike.

Boudi and Jhumur don't know how to react; they look at Titu help. lessly. Titu takes Tua on his chest and murmurs, "Darling!"

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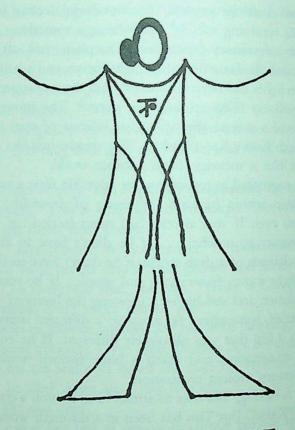
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Translated from Bengali by Santanu Sinha Chaudhuri



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The Living and the Dead

Tapan Bandyopadhyay

A helpless scream could be heard somewhere near the house.

Looking hard at the midnight gloom trapped in his room, Abinashbabu tried to figure out the nature of the wail. What was that? How far?

With warm quilt stretched up to his chin in this wintry night, Abinashbabu would have missed the scream, but sleep at seventy was always delicate. Abinashbabu heard the scream almost without any effort.

Yet, it was not an easy task to venture out in this chilly night.

After listening to the nonstop holler uneasily for some time, Abinashbabu could not return to his sleep. He slipped out of his bed, wore a shawl, and slowly opened the window.

A streetlight glowed dimly in the thin haze outside. Straining his aged eyes in the gloom what Abinashbabu could see was enough to stun him.

A few yards away, some youngsters were beating up a young man brutally. They were hitting the man so mercilessly that the sound of their blows and slaps could even be heard from a distance. The helpless scream of the victim was piercing the otherwise placid night.

After watching the terrible sight, Abinashbabu could not decide on what he would do so late at night. With his only son and the daughter in law out on a vacation a fortnight since, he was all alone in the house. The only servant was fast asleep, too. Feeling helpless, he tried to call out his neighbours, but, crossing the barriers of the closed windows, locked doors and the warm quilt, his frail voice could reach none.

Abinashbabu shifted his gaze to the telephone. With trembling hands, he dialled the nearest police station right away.

After several rings, a sleepy voice responded with a 'H-E-L-L-O' from the other side. The voice, somewhat drowsy, was followed by the sound of a yawn. Then an annoyed voice responded, "Duty officer speaking.."

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chemical Control of my house. Some "Look, a horrible incident is taking place in front of my house. Some "Look, a normal mouse some miscreants are battering a young man ruthlessly. He might be beaten to death, miscreants are battering a miscreants are battering a young man ruthlessly. Would you please some miscreants are battering a young man ruthlessly. Would you please some miscreants are battering a young man ruthlessly. if the police do not arrive immediately. Would you please come?" "Well, tell the location."

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Abinashbabu reported the exact location, and even charted out the

route so that the police van could reach the spot easily.

After hearing him out, the sleepy voice on the other side of the phone finally spoke out, "See, this is not within our jurisdiction. It might be within Kasba thana. You had better report it to Kasba."

The line was cut off instantly. While standing with the receiver in one hand, Abinashbabu felt helpless. He knew until now that this locality was under Ballygunge police station. He did not know since when his house had shifted to Kasba. Left without any choice, he dialled Kasba Police Station "Hello, Kasba thana? Could you please help?"

A loud voice boomed, "What do you say? Assaulting? Well, send an FIR. We don't have adequate force at the thana right now. They went out for night patrol. It will be looked into when they return."

After hearing about the F.I.R, Abinashbabu was in a dilemma. How would he lodge the FIR at Kasba Police Station so late at night?

He pleaded with the officer again, "This is an emergency! They have already injured the boy badly. They are still thrashing him!"

A sarcastic laugh came through.

"Are you new to Kolkata? Such things happen in Kasba every few minutes. Why are you getting upset? Had it been a murder, it might have received some attention."

"No, it's not a case of murder. However, the way they are beating him up, it's doubtful if he can survive long."

"Okay, tell me the location. Let's see what can be done."

As soon as he informed the location, a relieved voice answered back from the police station, "Oh, I see! That area does not fall under us. It might be under Jadavpur. You had better inform Jadavpur."

The line was abruptly disconnected. Abinashbabu's eyes widened in bewilderment. A short while ago, Ballygunge Police Station had pushed him to Kasba Police Station, now Kasba passed him on to Jadavpur. Jadavpur. Jadavpur. Jadavpur. Jadavpur. Jadavpur. after his call, might goad him towards Taltala or Kareya. It was highly likely that they might shove him to even to Shyambazar or to Dumdum!

Heaving a sigh, hardly Abinashbabu started walking up and down dark room at in his dark room when a terrible wail pierced through the window. Running

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widened in pushed him ır. Jadavpur, highly likely mdum! and down ow. Running to the window, he found that the young man, convulsing violently in pain, lay on the road. No one was around.

Unbolting the door, Abinashbabu walked uneasily in the dimly-lit

street to reach the spot.

The street was matted with thick blood. The man lying on the road was well within his mid-twenties. Dressed in a checkered shirt and black trousers, he had blood in the corner of his lips. Blood was also gushing out freely from the middle of his chest. The gloom of the night was filled up by his muted groan.

Abinashbabu shuddered at the sight.

Returning to his room hurriedly, he flipped through the telephone directory for Jadvapur Police Station.

After his tenth try, he could at last get to hear Jadavpur Police station, "Hello!"

With due seriousness, Abinashbabu narrated the whole incident to the police inspector now. He also reported that the man would die within a short time if the police did not rush to his rescue.

The police inspector, listening to him with somewhat attention so far, spoke out as soon as he heard the location of the incident, "It is not within our area, it's Ballygunge."

But, Abinashbabu was determined not to budge this time.

"Of course not! It's your area. I spoke to Ballygunge Police Station a short while ago, they had directed me to Kasba, and again Kasba sent me to Jadavpur. Now you just cannot send me back to Ballygunge. Please do whatever you can, or else the boy will die without any help."

"That I understand, but we cannot encroach upon other's jurisdiction. Is there a temple just near the site?"

'Yes, Yes!' Abinashbabu responded eagerly.

"Our area starts just behind that temple. It's Ballygunge on the other side."

Abinashbabu was getting more and more confused. He always knew that his house was located under Ballygunge Police Station. Nevertheless, the police officers, holding his house like a pawn in a game of chess, were placing it in one police station after another endlessly. On the other hand, not even a single rickshaw could be seen anywhere so that he could at least try to save his life somehow.

Feeling restless, he called up Ballygunge Police Station again. While dialing repeatedly, his fingers ached. After much effort, the yawning voice tesponded again, "H-E-L-L-O."

Tapan Bandyopadhyay / 87

"Listen, inspector. This area is definitely yours. I have just spoken to "Listen, inspection. This without a shred of doubt that the entire Jadavpur, they have informed without a shred of doubt that the entire

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Now, the yawning voice turned livid, "Look, you are extremely nagging. You have been badgering since long. Who will go to the spot so nagging. You have been single spot so late at night? We will see to it in the morning. Let me note it down instead

Perplexed, Abinashbabu told, "See, it is not a dead body. There is stabbing injury in his chest and he is bleeding profusely. Only a few minutes back, I have found him gasping for breath. With some effort, the boy might be saved even now."

"Not a dead body? Are you telling that he might take some more time to die?"

"Yes, he is writhing in pain."

"Why have you been calling the thana since then? Are there doctors in the thana that they can save him? Admit him to any hospital. Let the doctors treat him. People come to the police when the doctors fail. Those who are alive are treated at hospitals, and only the dead is treated at the thana."

Abinashbabu tried to reason, "I can understand pretty well that he should be admitted to a hospital without any delay, but the boy has been stabbed. It is a case of attempt to murder. As per rule, the police should be informed at first."

The police officer snapped, "Do you know more about law than me? Alright, you have already informed the police, now contact the hospital." Abinashbabu knew it quite bitterly what a hell of a place the government hospitals could be. He could still remember the hard labour he had to put on while admitting his ailing wife to a government hospital.

Constantly being chased by the police and, now, as if, after getting kicked in the end, he landed up at the hospital finally, "Hello, Emergency!" He repeated the whole thing to the staff on duty at the Emergency that he had been reiterating ever since, and then added his plea, "Could you please send an ambulance?"

A voice boomed from the other side, "Where can I get an ambulance so late at night? Two of them have been rusting for a couple of months out of the four ambulances we have. The R.M.O sahib has sent one to fetch medicine from the central store, but it is still missing. The other driver is enjoying earned leave. It is not so easy to get an ambulance, Moshal It is easier to get a helicopter instead."

"Will a life be lost so helplessly then?"

"What can I do if it is so? If anyone has a car in your neighbourhood,

bring him by that, or else call a taxi. If you cannot do even that, then try Nilratan.

Abinashbabu heard the sound of replacing the receiver from the other end. With the line getting disconnected abruptly, Abinashbabu stood bemused clutching the receiver.

Would he now wander from one hospital to another hospital up through the remaining night like a fallen angel? From Nilratan to Medical, from Medical to R.G.Kar...

The feeble moan could still be heard inside his room. Putting down the receiver, Abinashbabu went near the window. He saw that the young man's struggling limbs were wearing out. The tremor in his body was slowing down rapidly.

Abinashbabu felt a twinge somewhere in his heart. Opening the door, he came out hurriedly in the street in biting cold. On reaching the spot, he noticed that the young man's eyes were half-closed while his body had turned almost stiff. Blood, dripping from his body, had drenched the entire patch of street. After a while, the young man's trembling fingers also stopped forever.

Abinashbabu could not decide on what he would do now. Would he call the police yet again to inform them that the boy for whose life he had appealed everywhere so fervently had turned into a corpse right now? What would the inspector reply now? He might still advice, "Okay, now call the Last Rites Society. Only they can treat the corpse."

Finally, he rang up the police station once more, "Hello, inspector. The boy is dead. Will you come just once?"

After repeated rings, the duty officer, who had been responding every time with a "H-E-L-L-O", woke up at last, "Do you actually suffer from insomnia? Is he a relative of yours?"

"Not at all. He is a complete stranger."

"Why have you been whining then? Haven't I assured you that we will go at the appropriate time?"

Pushed to a corner, Abinashbabu shot back, "You made me run all around Kolkata throughout the night. Should I report it to Lalbazaar now?" The voice on the other side seemed confused, "Alright, let me note down the incident. Do you know his name? Address? Where is he from? What's more, do you know who provided him protection so far?"

"What?" Abinashbabu could not follow what the officer was hinting at.

"Well, is it the Green or the Red?"

Tapan Bandyopadhyay / 89

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upon hearing him, the inspector replied, "Not at all. I am not playing with colours, but there will be Holi in your neighbourhood within a short while."

Putting down the telephone without any hope, Abinashbabu looked away. It was almost dawn. There was no sign of life in the street yet. A stray dog was making rounds near the corpse. With anxiety settling heavy on heart, Abinashbabu went out to the street again.

His heart skipped a bit when he looked at the half-closed eyes of the dead young man.

Standing alone there, he was stirred by a shrill voice, "What are you doing here?"

He found that a rough-looking young man, barely out of his teens, with uncut beard on his crumpled cheeks was staring at him crookedly. It was hard to believe that so much cruelty could lurk in the eyes of somebody so young.

Without waiting for an answer from Abinashbabu, he asked again, "Do you know who has killed Patla?"

Abinashbabu could only tell, 'Not at all.'

The shrill voice rang again, "This dead body belongs to our party. Just keep a watch. I will return after some time with the whole gang."

Leaving him utterly puzzled, the young man left the spot running Before Abinashbabu could recover from the shock, a bearded young man appeared suddenly in the scene. He hissed, "Do you know who has killed Bhola?"

Again, Abinashbabu moved his head, "Not at all."

"Well, just stand guard here for sometime. This dead body belongs to our party. Don't let anyone escape with it."

Making a confused Abinashbabu stand guard, no sooner did he leave than another young man was seen running to the site from the same direction.

Abinashbabu was worried that this young man might also ask him whether he knew who had killed their party's Paltan. He left the spot in a hurry.

While returning quickly to his house, Abinashbabu was muttering "Where have you been until now, boys? Nobody could be seen around when there was life in his body!"

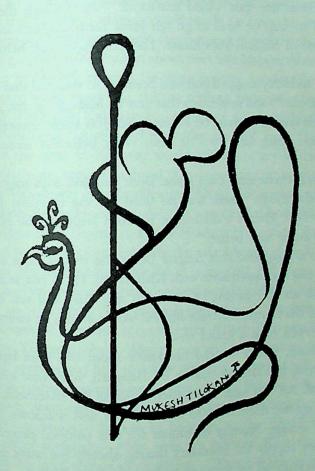
Before he could set his foot on the verandah, Abinashbabu heard a

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loud bang behind. A crude bomb might have exploded somewhere. Looking back, he could find only a thick screen of smoke all over. By then, various back, he can over. By then, various political parties – small, big, medium – were running to the site from all political part of them had at least some weapons in their hands.

Abinashbabu could finally understand that it was the beginning of a new game with the dead body while another game had been played throughout the night when the man was alive.

Translated from Bengali by Sekhar Banerjee



Tapan Bandyopadhyay / 91

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Harsha Dutt

Coming near the spot Vinod remarked: "Ahead along the right hand road. This way we have to go ten yards further. There we shall enter the courtyard of Kishori Pal's house. The tree stands just behind Mr. Pal's house."

Nitai suddenly stopped and said pointing to the land that sloped away in front of them: "I still remember that here's a Mahogony tree. A wonderful piece of high quality. It must be 80 years old, you know something brother Vinod? I have come here two or three times before. I remember everything."

"Then it's your very own place. Both you and Satu might come and manage all the things. There was no need for me to come here."

"Why not? There's a difference between knowing the place and the man. Do I know him better?"

Vinod is surprised that despite being the owner of a saw-mill this clever Nitai has no aquaintance with Kishori Pal. He is not at all unknown to them who are the owners of saw-mills who buy and sell the trees on both sides of the Ganga. Specially Mr. Pal would always be easily recognised because he owns such a grand tree.

Of course, Vinod too did not know about this man before. It was Abaid Ali Pyke, the famous mason of Balagarh, who first informed him about Mr. Pal. Ali had said: "Just after finishing the basement of the new school building we must have to set up doors and windows. "But where to find such a huge quantity of timber for this colossal project? Nobody of this locality supply the necessary quality, sheerly for want of sufficient resources. Secondly all these are to be brought from Kolkata, expenses will be doubled. A decision was taken in the third meeting of the governing body that the supply of timber must be arranged from here itself. If required a tree that yields high quality timber might be purchased. Vinod

was entrusted with the responsibility of identifying such a tree and purchaswas entracted to do so finally. With the increase of human habitation, the number of trees has gone down considerably in these areas. And so, a good tree is rare, to be found. On the other hand the newly constructed school building would certainly be a prestige issue in this locality. Therefore low quality doors and windows cannot be fitted. There would be no obligation to do good job because the government has sanctioned a lot of money. Everything can be done well if the Government money is not siphoned out. So money is no problem in this, but the real problem is to find out a good, big tree, an ideal tree of high quality.

Vinod did not sit idle after being assigned the job. Some days ago, Neelambar had informed him that two teak trees were at Aatpur. They were the subject of a family dispute, and both could be taken surreptitiously right away. Vinod at once rushed there. But no use. A case was going on in the court. Untill it was settled, nobody could touch the trees. Moreover, Vinod was not so interested in them, because they were not matured trees. Meanwhile, many people gave him information about trees like Mango, Almond, Shirisa, larul etc. But he felt no interest. He was counting the days in expectation of a most exceptional, regal tree. It goes without saying that he was a little disappointed. One day Kalidasbabu, president of the school governing body and Panchayat Chief of the locality warned him: "Look Vinod, searching for the trees in this way would make you cry in the wilderness ultimately. No more time is at hand. Do something at your earliest."

When Vinod was in this dilemma Abaid Ali at that very moment brought Kishori Pal to his notice. Ali was a somewhat boastful person. He learnt his carpentry at Bagmari's Bihari Muslims in Kolkata. But, he was a gentle person too. At his own initiative, he asked Vinod if he knew Kishori Pal of Jeerat. He also added, "Mr.Pal is a man of old ways. Very much ill-tempered and unyielding. In his courtyard stands a Mahogony tree. I have seen it with my own eyes. You can ask the old man whether he will sell the tree. The eyes of everyone is on that tree. There is no tree equal to this in the locality. Tall and robust. Almost one and half century old. Do you know, once I approached him to know whether he would sell it. That old fellow at once rushed towards me to beat me up. It is of course the case of almost five years ago....Now his temper and strength has almost exhausted. He is beyond the age to hold on to the tree firmly." Vinod thought of other problems—"His sons are present. This time they may tesist." Abaid Ali Pyke remarked chuckling—"This old fellow is alone here. His sons and others live in Kolkata. Here, he keeps vigil on his treasure all alone like a Yaksha. You can discuss the matter with him at least. Let him agree or not."

Harsha Dutt / 93

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At that very moment, Vinod decided that he would have an introductory meet with the old man one day. Without noticing anyone he knew, the reached Jeerat. At the station he got the information about Mr. Pal's house cutting hay with a sickle sitting on the ground. His house was made of four bricked walls and its roof was half-thatched and half-tiled, in the north west corner stood that large tree rising its head high into the sky. Straight upright. Vinod's lustful eyes appeared to be bright and dazzling. Kishori Pal, till then couldnot detect Vinod's presence behind him outside the encircling fence. Vinod intentionally asked him "Do you hear me? I have come here to meet Kishori Pal. Is he at home?"

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The old man staring his fixed eyes at him replied—"Yes I am Kishon Pal. Where do you come from?"

"O is it you? Accept my namaskar. I am coming from Balagath.

"O, come, come with me inside the room". The old man then wanted to know, having been a little surprised— "Who informed you about me?

I generally avoid mixing with others as far as possible."

Vinod Sincerely repled- "Suppose I have found you out in my own interest?"

Kishori Pal remained rather unmoved by Vinod's words. There was a little suspicion. But the man had opened up before him a book of many old stories. From inside, the tree was rather invisible. Only its branches and leaves were bringing to him a rustling sound. Talking with the man that day Vinod clearly understood one thing—that the old man's interest in the landed property has almost come down. One day he has to close his eyes leaving all these behind such a tragic feeling has crippled the man. Yet that day Vinod could not make the proposal of buying the Mahogony tree.

Today Vinod has come again at Jeerat with Nitai and Satu, the saw-mill owner and his helper. Vinod will make the proposal to Kishori Pal and in the meantime, the other two will measure the tree with their expert eyes. They will come to the point of discussion as to how the tree will be brought to the school after cutting it down. The old man will detect nothing. They will perform the job very silently. Walking along, they entered Kishori Pal's farm house. With suppressed emotion Vinod told them to look at the sky, "Look! That's Kishori Pal's Mahogony tree. It has soared its head high up above all the others. Look, always be careful, there won't be any problem. The job will be done well—I wish so with heart and soul."

Keeping his affectionate hand over Vinod's shoulder Kalidasbabu remarked: "Don't mind, my brother, I had no intention to say something on this very special day. It comes in the course of conversation. The proverb goes thus—habit is second nature. We are now in a dilemma about our

next action." Vinod replies – "No no Kalida, I would never mind. Likewise, the same thought is dissuading me. But till now I have not given up the matter. I am convinced that finally we must achieve this goal. Oh I forgot to tell you. For this special day I also invited Kishori Pal. He may probably come. I am waiting."

"What do you say? Could I ever face the old man?"

"What do you say? Could I ever face the old man?"
"Wait a bit. He will appear here very shortly."

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e proverb about our "No, my brother. I have to go to Bandel in a little while. A lot of work, there. I have to move about with the local chief.....I have had a satisfactory lunch. Indeed a palatable dish of doi-hilsa. See you later."

"Vinod accompanied him, upto the door and saw him off. Today is Vinod's only son's annadaan utsav*. On this occasion of simple domestic significance, Vinod invited some relatives, friends, office colleagues and people known to him. Vinod thinks that only after having a simple dish of rice and fish will they bless his son. Inspite of it being a very simple occasion, the whole house has been plunged into jovial festivities. The most happy person is Vinod's wife.

The chubby six month old baby is being rolled down from one's lap to another's. Heaps of dolls and many other gifts are coming up in the corner of the room. From the balcony Vinod saw Nitai coming. In his hand is a stainless steel dish wrapped with coloured paper. Gift to be given on the occasion of *annadaan*. Coming downstairs, Vinod asked him goodnaturedly, "Why are you so late? Coming a little early you could help us....." Nitai appeared very serious. Then he replied with a dry smile on the face, "Here you have lot of helpers." Looking around he then asked Vinod, moving his eyes, "Has Kishori Pal come? That bloody old fellow...."

"You are still angry with him? It's quite unnecessary to be so angry over such a trivial matter." But Nitai cannot control his hot temper. Blowing over the gift he said — "I must see that bloody old fellow."

Nitai cannot forget the incident of that day. Kishori Pal insulted him so deeply. He never spared even Vinod and Satu. But among them Nitai took this to heart too much. He was enraged when he heard Vinod had invited Kishori Pal for his son's annadaan utsav. He told Vinod: "Even after this insult, you invite him. You have no sense of dignity at all." Vinod tried to calm him down and replied: "I think the tree is more important than the man. How long will Kishori Pal live. But that Mahogony tree. It has no substitute. I have to have that tree. Getting angry, Nitai said — "O my brother, don't give me the excuse of that tree. In my saw-mill there are many valuable trees that have been sown into planks. Even Burma teak.

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festival of offering first rice to mouth

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
In the whole of Bengal, could you find only this old man's Mahogony tree. In the whole of Bengal, could yet get you positive information about the Give me a month's time and I'll get you positive information about the Give me a month's unite and a get anything about the timber. But Vinod does not know whether Nitai would get anything about the his anger never cools down.

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That day, before proposing the matter of the tree to Kishori Pal, Nital was observing his style of conversation and gestures. After some casual talks Vinod had finally exploded the bomb - "Kartamasai, we have come here to buy that Mahogony tree. If you permit we can settle the price. We need the tree very badly." Kishori Pal was disturbed as if by the sound of thunder, He moved backward having been shaken by an invisible terror. As if he was listening to something incredible and unimaginable. Then he asked in a shrill voice: "What do you mean? You all come here only for this reason?" Vinod knew well the old man could not tolerate the whole thing. He would go mad any moment. Yet there was nothing to do but saying something affirmative. Even if they were to be kicked and beaten with broom the tree is required. Vinod remarked in the tone of grandson pleading with his grandfather- "Kartamasai, Balagarh High School is being built. Strong and long-lasting doors and windows will have to be made of Mahogony wood. There's no other tree available except yours. Will you not help us?"

"You are the son of a gentleman, otherwise I would throw you out by the neck....I will never sell this tree even if I die. You have a great deal of education. Can you convince me please with any argument, why I shall sell this tree? I have no troubles with this tree and it never pokes into my affairs. Then? Can you sell your own son?" The old man told him all these in single breath. Nitai suddenly said tauntingly - "What does he mean by 'son'? There is no trace of his own son. Now the tree is supposed to be his own son. All the childish sentiments due to senility." The old man's sunburnt face grew red in anger. Seizing his shirt's collar he shouted - "Who are you? What do you feel about the heart of the tree?"

"Leave it. You are going to show magic with your rusted bones. I don't feel the heart of the tree. Through fourteen generations I operate the sawmill. I don't feel it."

"O I see, you are of that class who cuts the trees. Cremate the dead trees. Sala dom. Get out from here at once." Kishori Pal almost turned him out forcefully. He did not even spare Satu. He was sitting silently. Now furious, he commented, "This Mahogony will burn your funeral pyre." Vinod somehow managed to calm them down and again requested Kishori Pal, "Will you not help us?"

"No no! I shall never sell even if you offer me lakhs of money. You can do whatever you want."

"Well, we go back. But think a little. You cannot look after this tree

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forever. Today or tomorrow the tree will be axed from its root. You could offer the tree for an honest purpose. We will give you sufficient money." In an unknown pain the old man sat down on the ground pressing his chest. Groaning in grief he replied, "You cut the tree after killing me."

That day, while coming back from the old man's cottage Nitai told Vinod, "Vinod you have taken me to a strange man. Just a living devil. I must see him one day. Today in the auspicious day of Vinod's son," Nitai repeated.

Vinod smiled and said – the time is up. Now you first have lunch sitting in this row. Next, you can decide how to take revenge on the old man."

Nitai replied, "Let Kishori Pal come, then I will sit for the lunch. I want to see whether Palbabu falls in the trap of your politics or not. You think you will seduce him offering such invitation. I am telling you such tricks won't serve any purpose. He won't give the tree by sweet words, we must have to snatch it from him."

"Oh, the man is very lonely. Without mixing with outside people he has become so obstinate and confused. So I invited him for my son's feast. He would be pleased." Vinod looks rather sympathetic. Looking at Vinod angrily, Nitai entered the house.

Finally Kishori Pal did not turn up. Nitai laughed at Vinod making fun of him. Before leaving the party he remarked, "Vinod, you recognise the tree, but not Mr. Pal."

After the whole days' feast everybody is almost tired and exhausted. Relatives are lying down here and there. Something strikes Vinod's mind again and again that inspite of all the things going quite smoothly, there's a gap somewhere. Vinod lit a cigarette, immersed in thought.

Evening will descend soon. All around, light is waning. Mea-while, near the gate a short-statured, black-complexioned man appeared. Seeing Vinod he said, "I am coming from Mr. Pal. My name is Sasadhar. Mr. Pal has sent this for Vinod's son." Vinod moved over to him and Sasadhar handed over a tied up gunny-bag. He said, "I can no longer wait here. My eye-sight is poor. I want to be off before the approaching darkness. Pranam Babu. Sasadhar went away and Vinod unfastened the bag. From inside he pulled out the seedling of Mahogony tree. With the seedling was stuck a small piece of paper. Written on it with shaking hand - "It is same aged as your son. Grow them up."

Translated from Bengali by Sumit Talukdar

Harsha Dutt / 97

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Jhareshwar Chattopadhyay

After the continuous rain of the past few days, the clouds have vanished and it's a sunny *shravan'* day today. As soon as she descends from the cemented verandah, the church clock strikes two o'clock. In the junior school, the gong sounds twice, signalling the end of tiffin time.

Bijoy, who is thin and fair, gathers his shawl and says, "Tread carefully."

The courtyard is filled with stagnant water. It ripples as she tries to find the bricks of the walkway. Waves break out in thin lines. And that confounds the eyes. She wears her sandals for the rainy season to avoid the slush. And so she concentrates on finding the bricks.

Bijoy Bose says anxiously, "Your saree is getting wet."

Dark and fortyish, Emily Mondal hitches up her blue saree quite a bit. Her smooth calves take on the colour of *hingche-kalmi*² in the muddy water.

Looking carefully, Emily steps on the brick walkway. The water ripples. Emily's calves and knees get submerged. At the edge of the cemented verandah, the water ripples gently.

Standing on higher ground, Emily Mondal bends her neck sideways to look at her wet legs.

From the verandah, Bijoy shows concern, "Should I bring you a towel or a cloth?"

"No. Not at all. Just lie down quietly. The cold that you've managed to catch! Let me return from school. I'll make some tea."

He is silenced by Emily's reproof. But the reproof does not seem as sweet as it used to, once.

^{1.} shravan: The month when the rainy season peaks.

^{2.} hingche-kalmi: Aquatic plants

Before him lies the water. Bijoy's eyes stretch beyond it. First, Emily loosens her fist. Slowly, the petticoat descends. The white petticoat gets soaking wet as it brushes down her wet knees and calves. Along with her petticoat, saree and bag, Emily is reflected in the stilled water. Emily walks. Her reflection too swims ahead.

In a flash, a thousand barbs prick Bijoy's memory. An intense irritation floods his whole being. And he thinks..."Why on earth did I spend these last eight-ten years with this woman? To get what, to hold on to what?"

At that time Emily had said, "You must abandon your wife first." "But I have almost come to that, Emily..."

"Are you telling me the truth?" Emily was doubtful even then.

"Believe me. I promise in the name of your Mother Mary and your Lord Jesus."

Then let's go - to our pastorate, to Father - to the Shepherd. Let our Mother Mary be your mother, let Jesus be your Lord."

And then...

An affidavit was made on a Rs 10 stamp paper. After that was done, the Christian community had stood surrounding the cemented bank of the pond. The clock tower of the old church was striking two then. Ding dong...

As soon as he steps into the water in his new clothes, his heels get immersed. After that, his foot... his knees. In Bijoy's baptism ceremony, the pond becomes the sacred river Jordan. The Father is in his white cassock; Bijoy's knees and thighs are rooted in the water. The Father's white cassock gets wet right to the end of his girdle. And Emily stands amidst the other women on the bank.

In front of him is the water of the pond. And in that water, Emily's body blossoms all around him. How desperate he is to get her near...to get her like the water....for ever! The white cassock-clad Shepherd-Father begins reading the words of the prayer:

"On this auspicious occasion, let us remember that our supreme saviour Lord Jesus Christ had immersed himself in the sacred water of the Jordan before embarking on his mission to save mankind. We who are sinners depend on You and have come to cleanse ourselves, to rid ourselves of all dross."

Bijoy stands in waist-deep water. So does the Shepherd-Father. A few feet of water separate them. And there is water all around. The church-going Christian folk watch the baptism-seeking Bijoy. And Emily watches the man whose lived past is being washed clean.

The river Jordan lies in some remote, geographical corner of the world. And yet that same river is gradually giving this man the opportunity

[hareshwar Chattopadhyay | 99

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Portia, a married woman in the neighbourhood, nudges the dark voluptuous Emily and says, "Your hubby may be a little thin but he's quite good-looking, you know." Emily's round, heavy face breaks into a smile. Her white teeth look whiter in joy whiter and brighter than the wet cassock of the Father. The man may be someone else's husband, but thanks to the recognition of the assembled gathering, he will become hers from now on. His body shall be bathed by the grace and forgiveness of Lord Jesus Christ.

"You look so strong. So don't you go wanting him too much, you hear," the woman counsels. The fair woman's head-covering falls off and her black hair flutters in the air. Emily holds Portia's neck and whispers into her ears, "It is he who wants it more, can't you see the depth to which he has descended."

"Hm, till his waist, and now he'll immerse his neck!" And as she says it, the woman's heart grows sorrowful.

Her own husband often doesn't return home at night. There are some young girls who take the same train as him. They work on the sewing machines of the bag company. God knows where he goes off with one of them. He works in a factory and the money gets over before the month does. All his love seems to be for those young daily passenger girls. And we...Her head feels hot thinking about it. Her forehead sweats. She wipes her face and eyes with the end of her saree. Standing beside her, Emily notices and immediately says, "Your sindoor3 has got smudged bond3."

"Let it." There is carelessness in her tone. Portia is careless about herself as well. In front of them, Bijoy keeps going down in the water. The woman looks at Emily and says, "You are no young woman either, yet the man loves you so much."

Enriched by that compliment, Emily, who was then about 28-30 years old, had smiled slightly. And flowing out of her body, what countless flowers had that smile conjured up all over the bank of the pond!

Emily gets even more intimate with the woman and putting her hand on her shoulder, draws her close.

The Father and Bijoy seem to loom over the bank of the pond. As the baptism ceremony progresses, their hands and knees move. Waves break out on the water of the pond, drawing zig zag lines. Wind-driven, they flow towards the bank. And later, they disappear into the adjoining water. In the

^{3.} *sindoor*. Vermilion. Hindu married woman wear the red powder in the parting of their hair and as a dot on their forehead. It is a symbol of their married status.

^{4.} boudi: A married, older sister-in-law.

same way, leaving his home, Bijoy has immersed himself in Emily. He is same way, engrossed in her, as it were, and that is why they want to know all the details. "Emily!"

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"How many children does he have?"

"I have seen one daughter and one son."

"How old are they?"

"The girl is five. The boy is about seven years old."

"Well, then!" The woman is amazed as she learns all the little details of his life. It is as if she can't quite fathom what she learns. She looks at the man in the water and then her eyes rest on Emily. And then she speaks, "So will you stay here from now on?" Her tone expresses a terrible dread.

"Oh no" Emily replies, taking care to lessen her friend's anxiety, "I have been frank with Father. I have told him, find us a place that is not frequented by the people of this locality, a place that is not visited by even the air that belongs to this area. Let their ancestral house and property be left behind. I just want to take him away. We will work for our living. We will be alive."

Though she used to stay right here, what distances had Emily's being traversed! A place where there would be no seven o'clock train. A place that would be out of the reach of the girls of the bag company... "If only I could get such a place! Then even at this age, my man would have been besotted with me..." Portia's regret slams into the water.

Bijoy was then in chest-deep water. Getting the answer to his first question, the Father senses the entrancing touch of the water of river Jordan in this pond,.

Bijoy listens to the Father's second question:

"Do you promise to lead your life in the power of the Holy Spirit and as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?"

"I do." Bijoy's voice expresses humility.

"As an acknowledgement of your faith and vow, do you wish to be baptized now?" From the bank of the pond, a great reassurance emanates from Emily's eyes. Immersing his chest, the water now touches Bijoy's neck. Responding to the deep, secret pull of the water, he quickly replies, "Yes, Shepherd."

That same neck is now encircled by the shawl. The chest is congested, full of phlegm. So many years later! So many hundred miles away! Away from the homes of so many thousand people, away from his place of birth, its gardens and ponds...in some foreign land! He has left behind so many things—the temple area, the pond belonging to the Sarkars that was as big as a lake, its huge cemented banks, the bets about swimming its length

Ibareshwar Chattopadhyay / 101

Digitized by Arya Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri underwater. Where have they all gone? And where is his wife, the pleasantly dark-complexioned Chhabi? How old are his son and daughter now? Whose colour has the girl got? Her mother's or mine? And the boy? The anguish of fatherhood twists Bijoy's heart. There is a glass-covered picture of Lord Jesus on the wall. His head is crowned with thorny creepers. A gust of wind in the empty execution ground sends them swinging They side of the bed, in the cardboard box, there is one gross centrifuge tube, there are cylinders for making medicines, a few glass funnels with narrow tubes, tubes to measure RBC and ESR. But he can only supply these to the hospital when he gets better. Beside the box are his diary and a decrepit attaché case. He takes the green inland letter out of the case and going near the window, in that insufficient light, he squats on the floor. He takes the pen and as he sits there thinking awhile, he finds the words to begin,

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"My dear Chhabi,

I am writing this letter after 10 or 11 years..."

Two

The blue sky has immersed itself in the huge pond. This pond, or rather this lake, has been dug out of 16 *bighas* of land. There are broad banks on its four sides. And they are verdant with thick grass.

On two sides of the broad, terraced bank, there are high benches engraved with chessboard squares. The steps go right down, almost to the depth of the foundation of a one-storeyed building. Finishing her huried bath, the woman looks at the sky. Water drips down her hair, down her forehead and on to her eyelashes. She looks for the sun in mid-sky. But by then the sun had already moved quite a bit towards the western sky. Standing in neck-deep water, the woman brings her palms together, touches them to her forehead and offers her prayers three times. When she opens her eyes, she sees the bamboo, grove on the western bank. There are four or five tall bamboos their surface covered with the yellowish secretion of age, their tops and middle bent low by their immense height. And in between them can be seen the temple of Goddess Shitala with its tiled roof.

The old banyan tree gives shade. It keeps the temple cool. It keeps one cool during those terrible times. When, in the months of phalgun and chaitra, village after village are stricken with measles and small pox. Hindus

^{5.} *phalgun-chaitra*: The two spring months in the Indian calendar and traditionally, the time when small pox strikes the most.

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and Muslims alike come running with pitchers and tumblers. The temple ground is filled with people who come to take the holy water washed off Goddess Shitala's feet. They pray for a cure, and their prayers have enor-Goddess become mous power. At such times, mandir and masjid, temple or mosque, become one and the same.

The woman ties her wet hair with a single knot and stands up straight. She again offers her prayers, this time to the Shitala temple on the bank of the pond. Then, she steps out of the water and goes up the stairs. A cheap saree clings to her body. Her towel is hardly big enough to cover her back and chest.

She walks in her wet saree, making a swishing sound as she goes. The steps that were dry in the heat of the two o'clock sun, become wet. Her wet feet leave marks on the terrace. Water sprays from the border of her saree.

On the right is the open ground where the platform for the Dol6 festival is situated. On the left is the empty hall where Durga puja is held. A cobbled path leads to the panchayat and to the road that goes to another village. A few electric posts were set up on this path but the project seems to have been abandoned there.

The woman's saree sprinkles water. Leaving the mark of her wet feet, she turns to the right. Her saree sticks to her knees, her waist. Gradually, she reaches the grassy patch around her home. The earth may get scarred. But the grass covers everything.

The house has a tiled roof and a cemented verandah. Inside, there are mud floors even now. They are cleaned with cow dung until they gleam. The only pieces of furniture are a big, wooden shelf and an old trunk. The children's text books and exercise books are kept beside that. The woman wears a dry saree and shakes her wet hair. Her hair rolls down her back and she runs a comb through it. There is a mirror mounted on the mud wall. Its frame is made of ebony. There is a cubbyhole for keeping her sindoor, ribbons, teep7 and Vaseline. Her forchead is freshly scrubbed. She takes the brass sindoor box in her left hand. With the wedding fire as his witness, hadn't her man applied the sindoor on her 19-20 years ago? And before the eyes of so many relatives and neighbours, that young girl had been transformed into a married woman. The man had put the sindoor on her with his finger and she had been bloodied before the whole community.

Time has tarnished the brass sindoor box. It has lost the sheen of regular use. Out of habit, she dips her finger into the opened box. She feels

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^{6.} Dol. Holi or the festival of colours associated with the deities Radha and Krishna.

^{7.} teep. A dot worn between the two eyebrows for the purpose of beautification.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennal and eGangotri somewhat reluctant to touch her finger to her washed forehead. But still, somewhat reluctant to touch her forehead. But still she wills herself to bring her finger on level with her forehead. In the mittor she wills herself to bring her sees neither her face, nor her body. The woman's entire concentration she sees neither her face, nor her body. The woman's entire concentration is directed at bridging the gap between her forehead and her finger.

"Hello! Where's everybody?" The question bounces off the gate and "Hello! Where's everyout, the words nush reaches the courtyard. Sailing through the opened door, the words nush

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The suddenness of it makes her gather her saree in a confused bundle. The woman comes out and stands at the end of the verandah.

"Ghosh kaka?'8

"You have a letter."

"Where from?"

"Let's see." Postman Tarak Ghosh looks at the stamp of the postal department. There are three of them. He examines them and concludes, "Burdwan."

"Burdwan...But I don't...we don't have any relatives there," the woman says.

On the side of the house belonging to her brothers-in-law, a woman stands on the verandah with her baby in her arms. The old aunt-in-law stands a little further away.

In the afternoon sun, the papaya tree's shade falls on their verandah "Wherever it is from, open it and read it," says the old woman encouragingly.

The woman reaches out for it, "Give it to me, kaka."

The letter quivers as she presses it between her thumb and forefinger. She thinks, "My father's house? That's in Hooghly. My uncles? That too is in Arambagh. Someone from my in-laws' family..."

There is still a lot of light in the verandah, light that trickles down the edge of the tiled roof. Carefully, she tears open the letter and sees, "Do not be surprised. Though I am not near you, I do see all of you from afar. You are struggling terribly to run the family. You are bringing up the boy and the girl. I have wronged you unforgivably. I have been grossly unfair on those two small, innocent children.

I fall ill often. At such times I think I would be cured if only you would forgive me and caress my forehead and chest. I can't take it any more. I don't like it any more. I want to come back. Will you accept me? Will you let me stay with you? Please, I beg of you, give me shelter. I am not giving my address but if you – all of you – agree, I will get to know of it. Let Lord Leave 1 it. Let Lord Jesus keep you well.

kaka: Uncle. Any male acquaintance of the previous generation may be addressed as kaka dressed as kaka.

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Love to you and blessings to the children

Bijoy..."

Chhabi reads the letter. Being semi-literate, she stumbles over words that seem unclear and confusing. So she reads it again, groping for the meaning of the words. She goes to the essence of the letter. But that does not give her comfort. Rather, it gives rise to a sense that is part amazement, part helplessness in her life as a woman. She runs to find a well-wisher. But Chhabi's geographical and social world is not large. It comprises her past and present, her father's house and that of her in-laws here, and the few known people and families associated with them. So she rapidly goes on her way. Leaving behind the hall of the Durga Puja, the woman called Chhabi pushes open the main gate.

The house, the corridor, the drawing room, the pool as big as a lake-

what a big man is Sarkar babu, the man who owns all this!

How should she say her piece to get his attention? She cannot quite organize her thoughts. She goes up the stairs quickly. And from the landing, calls out in a distressed tone, "Meshomashai!" Meshomashai!"

"Who is it? Bouma?" he says in the deep voice of an elderly man. Chhabi gives him the letter and tells him everything. Then she squats

on the cemented floor and awaits his ruling. Such servile humility in a woman never fails to soften the heart of a powerful man. Which is why it feels so good to show pity on a person who seeks a favour. And so, Sarkar meshomashai's voice drips concern, "What has happened that you have come in such haste?"

"Please read that and tell me what I should do."

"Meshomashai's wise, old eyes seem huge behind his thick, round glasses. He reads the letter once, then reads it again and says, "If the boy wants to come back home, let him."

And in a trice, all the anger, the repugnance and the accusations of ten years melt away.

They get steamrolled under the pressure of the reality of her situation, the grinding poverty of her family. After all, there is such a great need for a solitary woman like herself to have a man of her own! And so Chhabi wails, "He'll come, Meshomoshai..."

"Yes, let him."

"And then? The neighbours?"

"Nothing will happen. We are all here."

9. Meshomashai: Uncle. Any male acquaintance of the previous generation may be addressed as meshomashai.

10. bouma: Daughter-in-law. Any married woman of the next generation may be so addressed.

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
The old aunt and the young wives of the family become her society The old aunt and the joint and stand protectively around her. In their woman's eyes they see an and stand protectively has been deprived of her husband. unfortunate wife who has been deprived of her husband.

Three

There is a big Jaam tree in one corner of the courtyard of this house, People say Bijoy had planted the sapling. Drawing its sustenance from the ground it has now spread its branches and become a great tree with an enormous trunk. As the day draws to a close, the sun goes down and there is a sudden gust of wind. A dried leaf falls off the topmost branch of the Jaam tree, Slowly, floating down the air, it falls on the ground. From the great outer space, the evening too comes floating down with the leaf. And falls on this world. Chhabi feels like looking at the tree that had once been nurtured by her man. But just then, darkness envelops the tree. And everything else besides—the neighbouring houses, gardens, pool and huts.

Near the front gate, her aunt-in-law and sister-in-law light the evening lamp. They blow the conch shell. The sound knifes through the darkness of the courtyard and strikes her heart. A heart that feels empty, barren. Somehow, all these years, her emotions had lain dormant inside her. But today, they are in turmoil.

The night advances. A dense darkness settles over the world. It solidifies in the caves, in the bamboo grove, under the Jaam tree. The boy and the girl read in the light of the same lantern. They do their studies for the next day. In the kitchen, Chhabi puts the rice on to cook. The rice boils in the aluminium vessel. It makes a bubbling sound. And Chhabi, who sits before the fire, feels so many things bubble and boil inside her heart.

The 10 o'clock train roars past, shaking the room and the courtyard. When the sound becomes faint on the metal railway line, Chhabi calls out, "Come, here is your food."

With the oil running out, the light of the lantern takes on a reddish hue. In its light, the cheap rice gives off a brown glow. Their meals lie before the three of them. After the boy and the girl have a few bites, the mother looks up. She tells the son, "Manu, your chhotkaka" has sent money for your books?

Manotosh looks at his mother.

"Try and do well in your final exam. Your kaka will send you money for the tuition fees."

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^{11.} chhotkaka: The youngest uncle on the father's side.

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ou money

Daughter Rina sits beside her. Her hand rests on her plate of rice. She too looks at her mother expectantly. The mother says, "Rinu, your mejo pisht² has left a set of churidar-panjabi for you. And a couple of old sarees belonging to your cousin. You can wear them at home. Apply yourself in your studies. Your pishi will give you new clothes next year." With a wan smile, the brother and the sister begin to eat again. Chhabi looks at her children eating. She gives a little more vegetable to them. In the light of the lantern, there seems to be a hidden spark in the children's eyes.

The mother says, "Listen—"

The brother and the sister look at her. "What?"
"If your father comes back? Will you accept him?"

"No." The word escapes from Manotosh's clenched teeth and rocks the room and the verandah. His spine becomes straight as he pronounces this little word. When the sudden heat in his mouth subsides somewhat, the boy says, "At the time of filling up of forms, the headmaster had repeatedly said, 'bring your father over. It's necessary.' "A little later, his eyes well with tears. He says, "I could not get him then." Tears roll down his face. The mother wipes the tears with the end of her saree. Her own heart begins to moisten. Speechless, she waits silently. She has not heard all the answers as yet. Daughter Rina does not say a word. But she mutters to herself, "What's the point of him coming back? Even now, my classmates taunt me. 'Your father,' they say, 'the man who ran away with a woman?' "

With bowed head, she has to tolerate their painful jeers. After all, they do have a point. The fathers of her other friends have not left their mothers and run off. So if this man called "father" does come back, there would only be more taunts, more humiliation. Innumerable barbs assail the mother's other heart. Rina remains utterly silent after Manu's outburst. But though she says nothing, her eyes, her whole body, is eloquent with unspoken words. And how unbearable that is to the mother.

Four

An intermittent sound comes from one corner at the end of the large verandah. A snap and then the dry stuff crumbles under her hand. Under the grindstone, the edges of the iron blades become sharper. The chopped betel nuts collect on one side. On the right, there are three bundles of betel leaves. There is a tumbler full of lime. The cut betel leaves are spread over

[hareshwar Chattopadhyay / 107

^{12.} mejopishi: The second aunt on the father's side.

Digitized by Arya Samai Foundation Chennai and eGangotri banana leaves. Chhabi sits right against the wall. She puts some lime on the

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18.

The wives of the Sarkar household say, "We have taken a tumblet of Ganga¹⁴ water. Let's go and fetch aag¹⁵ from the Brahmin priest's house

Another woman, resplendent in her conch shell bangles and sindow, quickly counts the heads and says loudly, "Only six? But we need one more married lady! Who'll go?" Chhabi wipes the lime and khoyer off her hand on a damp cloth and says, "Wait, boudi, I will go with you,"

The eldest wife in the Sarkar household comes forward hastily and stops her, "No, no, Chhabi'di. You prepare the betel leaves,"

"It's alright. People won't eat till two o'clock, will they? I can do it after fetching the aag."

The senior wife feels impatient underneath. She says coaxingly, 'Bouli, why not finish this job."

To ingratiate herself with everyone Chhabi proclaims her efficiency, "Three hundred betel leaves—it won't take me more than two hours to prepare them."

The second wife of the Sarkar family now scolds her, "Do as we say, finish that job."

Her heated tone expresses a terrible contempt. Chhabi's heart trembles. She thinks, "I have been a part of every auspicious occasion in this rich household. If I haven't come, they have dragged me across to take part in so many rituals like applying turmeric on the bride, immersing the ghampho in the water. And today, I am not being invited to go and fetch the ag from the priest's house! On top of that they scolded me!"

The women whisper amongst themselves, "O bardi,17 what will you do?"

"No. Not Chhabi. Not on such an auspicious errand —." The eldest wife cannot find anything else to say.

Chhabi's face darkens with pain. "And I have been their companion on so many occasions," she thinks sadly, "Well, I am a poor, lowly woman and this is a great, rich house. It is not right for me to get so close to them. Besides, two extra people, the boy and the girl, are invited to the feast as well. And I can't even give any gifts... ."

^{14.} Ganga: The holy river. Its water is used in most Hindu rites and rituals. 15. aag. A ritualistic practice in rural Bengal. It involves bringing a plate full of various auspicious various auspicious articles from the Brahmin priest's house.

^{16.} ghaut. A pitcher that is used in rituals.

^{17.} bardi. Big sister or sister-in-law.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Feeling wretched with helplessness, Chhabi starts preparing the betel leaves once again. Engrossed in her work, she bows her head.

Chains made of coloured paper hang in the large corridor. In the courtyard, a platform has been made out of four banana trees. The elements of ritual are all there—ghee, bel leaf, sesame seeds, barley grains, flowers, blades of grass. The small topor¹⁸ is decorated with glittering tinsel. A big, low stool has been decorated with the picture of a lotus. Its petals seem to extend beyond the stool. The atmosphere is heavy with the smell of oil and spices, the smell of a good feast in the making.

Another wife says, "No, bardi, today my son will bathe and have rice

for the first time. Please abide by what's right and wrong."

The eldest wife mutters, "The whole neighbourhood knows about it. Hasn't Chhabi heard anything? Or has she heard and is still pretending to be a married woman?"

In the festive house, the old aunt gets to hear about Chhabi's hurt feelings. She tells Chhabi, "Bouma —"

Chhabi holds the wrapped betel leaf in her left hand. When its tip is tucked in, it will become a vital accessory of hospitality. Chhabi has poured all her hurt emotions into the task of doing just that.

The old aunt comes near her and consoles her, "Don't be angry, dear. Let those young wives do as they please. You—"

Stopping the old woman, Chhabi says, "But I have not said anything more, auntie."

The next moment, she lowers her head and bites her lips. She cannot control the tears.

Five

The mother cooks the rice. Rina studies in the light of the lantern. As soon as the 8.30 pm train goes by, the mother looks towards the courtyard. The darkness extends beyond her home engulfing the whole world. Inside, the mother feels lonely and restless. Lowering the flame of the lantern, Rina goes into the kitchen and says, "Shall I see to the rice?"

"Will you? Come."

The mother sits resting her back against the mud wall. She watches the fire in the stove. From time to time, she puts some wood and twigs into it. The stove burns higher. The rice boils in the vessel.

18. topor. A conical cap that is worn by the groom during the wedding. It is customary to put it on little boys as well on the occasion of their first rice eating ceremony. The ceremony takes place when they are six months old.

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Since Rina had not been studying, the lantern's flame had been kept low. Being put on high now, the light flares. The rice looks terribly white in that light. The mother's eyes mistake it for a bundle of white cloth. The mother asks fearfully, "Son, what did *Chhotkaka*, say?"

With a glance towards his sister, Manotosh looks at his mother. Replying to her question, he says, "Chhotkaka too is somewhat confused. He said the news about Father was just a rumour. So he will go to Madurhat station by the early morning train tomorrow. The Christian locality is just mile-and-a-half's on foot from there. He will go and find out from their parents if the news is true or not."

Tortured by anxiety, the mother sits motionless. It is as if a terrible judgment is about to be delivered. She says, "And then..."

"Chhotkaka will come here around eight or nine in the morning" Manotosh's voice becomes a whisper as he says so.

With overwhelming sadness, the mother listens to the son. The sister looks on unblinkingly.

Perhaps she listens to the drift of the words.

After she controls herself a little, the mother says, "There is rice on your plate. Finish it."

Manotosh gulps down his food and looks at his mother. His eyes fall on the iron and conch shell bangles on her wrist.

Rina too puts the food in her mouth. Her eyes dwell on her mother's coloured saree and the *sindoor* on her forehead.

The birds circle the sky a few times and come to rest on the trees. Men return home from work. A chilliness clings to the leaves and the grass. Fireflies gleam in the water of pools and ponds. The night spreads itself thickly.

Finishing the nitty gritty of household chores, mother and daughter lock up for the night. Another world is created within this room surrounded by mud walls. A world that is their very own. Its inhabitants are three in number. All these years the children have grown up with their mother as their support. Today, they do not say a word. Their regular topics of conversation at night – school, the head master, the marketplace, the bank of the pond – remain unmentioned. The atmosphere in the locked room feels close and heavy. The mother takes it all upon herself and says, "You both are feeling sad. What's the use of worrying about that uncaring, irresponsible man? Go on, go to sleep." A door has been cut out on the

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ocked room says, "You at uncaring, out on the wall between the two rooms. The mother puts the mosquito net on Monotosh's bed. She caresses his brow and says, "Go to sleep."

The chimney lamp rests against the wall. In its bright light, Rina lays the cot. The mirror on the wall reflects the light from the table. It sparkles with the light of the stars outside. Mother and the daughter tidy up the shelves and the clothes rack in that light and go to bed. One is a woman, the other, a young girl. The mother strokes the daughter's forehead, her hair. The loving caress casts the spell of sleep. Her eyes feel heavy. Like the grass, plants and sandbanks of this earth, the three of them lie silently.

The earth cools down. The air seems laden with coolness. After the tiredness of the day, sleep descends on every nerve and vein. To her right is her daughter and to her left, on the other side of the door, sleeps her son. She listens to the sound of their breathing. Around midnight, the mother feels a sudden wrench in her heart. She opens her eyes and thinks, "When will the night be over? How many hours is it to eight or nine o'clock!" Quietly, she leaves her bed. She puts up the chimney's flame. The burst of illumination lights up the mirror. Chhabi sees her own face in it. The brass sindoor box lies in the wooden cubbyhole. She picks it up and dips the finger of her right hand into it. The bright red powder smears the tip of her finger. There is sweat on her half awake, warm brow. It glistens in the light of the chimney. She makes a big round mark of sindoor on her forehead.

When she turns in her sleep, Rina senses the absence of her mother. Suddenly, she wakes up. Getting up, she sees the mother pressing the *sindoor* onto her forehead with a sorrowful eagerness. The *sindoor* rises like an island on her forehead. Some loose powder rolls down her eyebrows and reddens her nose. All these years, it is on her forehead that she has borne, the sign of the life that flowed in the man's veins, in his heart. It is there that she has paid her respect to it.

Rina comes close and calls, "Mother-"

The night is silent and the flash of light touches Manotosh's eyes too. Hearing his sister speak, he wakes up and comes near. He says, "Mother, even at this late hour—"

"The morning will only bring bad news. Will I ever be able to put this on again..." The mother's eyes fill with tears.

The two children stand there touching their mother. Their sorrowful breath whirls and eddies, making the mother's eyes brim over with limpid tears. The woman who has suffered and cried for ten years, is awash once more. From her two eyes flow Ganga, Jordan.

Translated from Bengali by Shuma Raha

[hareshwar Chattopadhyay / 111

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Swapnamay Chakravarti

T was feeling really low. Tarzan had hit me. I look up to Tarzan, take care of him as best I can. I sponge his arms and legs and trunk, rub him with oil, dust him with powder, I do everything. I change his batteries by the clock, change his carbon. But he hit me. I was pouring Mobil into the "oilhome" in his navel, carefully enough, shouldn't have hurt, suddenly he hit me. Why did he hit me? But a robot doesn't answer, of course. It's not a good time for me. When work is over I go walking on my own. Morose feet take me to the canal. I walk along the bank. Black water gushes through the canal. Oh, well, not water, acid. Not just acid either. Aldehyde-ketones arsenic-soda...how would I know all the names anyway? My job is to look after Tarzan. What's in the factory water is none of my business. Factory water is just factory water. The water is spewing smoke. It's so pretty. So many colours in the smoke. Smoke coloured green, yellow, pink. Just now a gob of smoke rose from the water all green, and turned yellow. In some places the smoke became blurry like mist. What a lovely sharp smell, Makes you cough somehow. A fallen leaf comes blowing from somewhere. Turns white the moment it drops into the water. Walking along the edge of the canal, looking at its pretty sights, I reach the pond.

There is a tree by the pond. There were many real trees here before. All dead. The leaves have fallen off long ago, and do not grow again. What's left is just wood. Dead wood, a carcass of wood. But the corpse doesn't tumble. Roots in the earth. Hanging roots reach for the ground uselessly. Here the soil grows no grass. The mud of the pond is queerly coloured. White in some places, and black in others. Sometimes as green as moss. Spaces striped yellow, some areas imprinted as if with the rainbow. Oil tloats on the water. The sun on it makes rainbows. I watch the beauties of the poison-pond.

Suddenly I saw bubbles in the water. Pretty bubble. The bubbles more,

darting forward, drawing back. These bubbles are different. Not the routine pricks of bloated gas, they are little bursts of life. I moved forward. Careful. A slip means death. I stared dumbstruck. Moving bubbles. Two eyes below them. A fish? But that's impossible. This is a poison-pond. Water from the factory flows into the pond through the canal. A board with a death's head is stuck in front of it. Caution. Keep away from the water. How can a fish swim around this pond blowing bubbles?

I rubbed my eyes and looked.

It's a fish alright. Opening its mouth to gulp water. Not water, acid or something. Fled when it saw me. It runs from me, just think! What fun! There it is again, its mouth moving. I go that way. Fled again. Oh, yes, it's a fish. Can life be born even in poisoned water? I felt good again.

I turned to go home. Have to tell the wife. I love her very much. She loves me too. We haven't sat and chatted in the halogen light for such a long time. We'll do that today. I saw Sir standing in front of his bungalow. In shorts. Going out to take his dog for a shit. Sir is very learned. In his room there are so many books, so many cassettes, so much glass, so many tubes; he has lots of acids, lots of gases.

The moment I spot Sir, I say, "Sir, fish!" Sir frowned at me. Why did I have to tell him? I could have brought the wife along to show her and the fish would, may be, run from me like it's scared, and I would feel a bit, you know, quite a bit, you know what, and then we would, you know, laugh and all. But I can't keep a word back. I said, "In the poison-pond."

"Nonsense."

Okay, fine, so it's nonsense. I'm off.

"Here."

"Sir?"

"What poison-pond?"

"There, Sir, where the water from the canal pours out."

"You're on pot, are you?"

"No. Sir."

"Really!"

"Honestly, sir, I've seen it with my own eyes."

"Wait a bit."

Sir went in. He came out again with a fishing line and hook and some cold shrimp from the fridge.

"Let's have a look," he said.

I went. Two steps behind him. At the poison-pond I said, "Over there, Sir, see how it's slapping the water."

Sir stared at me. Sir's forehead was a picture of lines. Sir handed me ^{a small} polythene bag and said, "Hold it."

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"May be this fish doesn't like shrimp," I said. Sir reeled in the line. A tiny, rolled-up, black, rough bundle was stuck at the end of the hook. The water had turned the bait of shrimp all funny. Sir hooked on fresh shrimp, and again the bait shrivelled and turned black.

Sir is thinking about something. I could see the fish come to the edge of the black water close to the bank. Not one....two....three....Are there more? Sir is still thinking. Then he said, "Wait here, I'm coming back." Sir left. I kept looking at the green and yellow stripes on the mud. The smell of gas from the water, the fish playing with bubbles of gas. The bubbles of gas beaten by the bubbles of life. Marvellous! God, how marvellous!

Sir came back. He, took two or three powders out of his bag Mixed them. Then poured some oil on it. A burst of flame. Smoke. When the smoke was gone some sticky stuff was left.

Sir's so fond of fishing! I hadn't known that. Sir is a man of so many parts. Hadn't known that. Sir said, new bait for new fish. Sir rolled up the sticky stuff and stuck it on the hook. Dropped the line. A little later the float moved. He pulled in the line. Got it, got it, got it. At the end of the line hung the writhing fish. Sir jumped up. The fish is hanging before his eyes. I feel terrific. I lean over and look at the fish. About a foot long. Popping out eyes. No scales on its body. Rough skin. Like a garden lizard.

Sir began to look serious. Eyes still. Body still. He repeated like a slow chant: "Eureka! Eureka! Mutation. New guest. New species. New birth. I name it Caraccass. My discovery. I have seen it first on this planet."

I said, "Sir, I saw it first. I am the one who showed it to you....."

Suddenly, without a word, Sir gave me a push. I am falling into the poison-pond. The wife's face is before my eyes. She'll become a widow. I fell into the water. Now I'll shrivel up, turn black and die. I fought somehow and managed to swim to the bank and stand up. I saw Sir standing with his hands on his hips. Why did Sir get cross with me? Why? I was about to ask him, when I saw him raise his right hand and stick a finger on his lips. Which meant, not a word. Keep your trap shut. Tight shut. I shut up. My clothes were all burnt, they crumbled away like dust. My skin had become dry and rough. Like the skin of a garden lizard. I hung my head and went home. My wife screamed and hid her eyes when she saw me.

I said, "Don't be scared, it's me, dear, just me."

Maybe she knew my voice. She removed her hand from her eyes, and put it back again immediately. Said, "No, it's not you."

I said, "Yes, dearest, it's me, always yours, only my looks have changed

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a bit. But I'm really me. For lunch we had spinach, too much salt, am I right? Last evening you bought a blouse, and you tried it on, the fitting's a bit, you know, sort of tight. So I said...."

The wife took her hand away from her eyes. Then stared at me unblinking for a while. Then burst out crying "Tell, me, tell me, who's done this to you?"

What could I say? Sir had his finger on his lips. I hung my head and mumbled that I had slipped and fallen into the poison-pond. This happened if you fell in there. Again the wife hid her eyes with her hands.

I looked in the mirror. Blackened skin, wrinkled, rough, white hair, white eyebrows, eyes popping out. I closed my eyes.

At night my wife rolled out a mat on the floor. The wife of my heart, my newly-married darling, slept apart. Said, 'Please don't mind, dearest, I'm feeling too scared of you.' It made me very sad.

Who's there to listen to my sorrows? So I tell Tarzan. While massaging him with oil, while sponging his body, I pour out my heart. He just listens. But at least he listens. In the factory they used to gape at me at first, scared, but they are no longer afraid. Now they are amused. They taunt me. Their taunts don't hurt my thickened skin.

One day Sir sent for me. I went to Sir's beautiful room. The first time in my life. The walls had a glow like a baby boy's cheeks. The ripple of the cold-making machine. A smell like flowers.

"Are they making fun of you at the office?" Sir asked.

Should I say yes, or maybe no?

I keep shut.

"It's affecting the work of the office," Sir said. "Bad for concentration. I've brought a mask for you."

Sir put it on me with his own hands. Said, "Look in the mirror."

He opened the door of the attached bathroom and pointed. I looked at myself through the eye windows. So good-looking. A real, total, handsome face. A smiling face. A real movie-star!

"So, happy now?" said Sir. I nodded.

Sir said, "You must come to work with this on everyday. This is your uniform"

I go home in the new uniform. At the door the wife is struck dumb again. So I say, "It's me, dear, just me. Always yours."

"Now which pond did you fall into?" she says.

I go close to her. I say, "My new uniform."

I try to snuggle closer. The wife says, "No, oh no. It isn't you. Like it's someone else."

Then I take off the mask. The wife still says, "But even now you are

Swapnamay Chakravarti / 115

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri not like you were. So the wife sleeps on the mat, and I on the bed, like

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We felt very proud because Sir's picture was in the newspapers. The we felt very productions and the strange fish Many solutions and that poison. pond. It's all in the papers about the strange fish. Many sahibs, boss-types started coming from all over. The pond is now protected. Barbed wite fencing. Sentry box. With a guard inside. But I've caught on that all this rigmarole is not there so that no one falls in like I did, actually it's protection

One day I went wandering to the poison pond. I saw it rippling with fish. Not rippling, rollicking. They've spawned lots. The whole pond full of such joy, God! I felt very good. I won't call it a poison-pond any more, But what will I call it then?

Such a lot of talk, so much discussion, in the factory canteen, in the teashop, in the country-liquor shack. America, Germany, all want to buy this water. Our company won't sell. I watch cars come and go, many sahibs, they come and go. So many bottles lying around when the boss-types leave, so many stripped bones....

It happened one day that our foreman came with gloves on. He showed the gloves around made from the skin of that strange fish. He said, "Acidproof, alkalie-proof, radio-activity proof." I looked. He said, "Terrific stuff." Said, the company would now make gloves and aprons and masks from the fish-skin. Said our factory would shut down.

We all live in fear of the shut-down. No-one knows when the news might come. We don't talk about it. There's always a smile on my maskface.

We have a clever friend. He said, rubbish, they're just frightening you. How can this factory close? The poison-water can only come from this factory, and the strange fish lives in the poison-water.

Another person said, it's not poison-water, its breeding-water. Our clever friend was proved right. Rumours said our Company was going to make plenty more poison-ponds, sorry, breeding-ponds, in which they'll breed this fish, and then sell the fish skin. For more breeding ponds you need more breeding-water. For more breeding-water more factories.

I won't lose my job. It made me very happy.

One day our foreman came to office with a mask on. A serious looking face. Of rough skin. A lot of personality. Personality all the time. Made of the skin of t of the skin of that Caraccass fish. A mask like that costs a lot. Acid-alkalieproof. Fire-radio-activity-proof. He said that our company had opened a new unit. There they were making aprons and masks from Caraccass skin.

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me. Made cid-alkalieopened a ccass skin. Our officers have each been given one. We couldn't make out whether he smiling, because he had on the serious-personality face-mask.

The wife is not happy with my goodlooking face. And scared when I take off the mask. She's too timid. What can I do? Within the smiling face my unhappiness lies hard like a tamarind seed. Does she feel my pain? Sometimes in the night I wake and hear my wife weeping on the mat on the floor. I get off the bed. I hold her and say don't cry. She cries all the more. I wipe her tears. I stroke her with my rough hands. She doesn't say anything even if it hurts. My mouth moves towards hers and she flies apart and weeps again.

Early one morning, the wife said, "Look, we can't go on like this. I think I'll go for a dip in that poison-pond of yours."

I shrank back in shock. I said, "You're so beautiful that..."

"I'd rather be ugly, we'll at least be happy," she said.

"Yesterday I saw two garden-lizards so happy together under the trees. Let me become like you, then we will be happy too.

I said, "But if you die? Do you know, the shrimp bait shrivelled and became black?"

"I'll die then," she said. "It's better to die than live like this."

So I said, "But how will you get in there? There's an iron fence, there's a watchman. Won't let you get anywhere close."

The wife said, "Please can't you talk to the watchman and arrange something for me?"

One day my wife, I don't know how, by persuading the watchman or by magic, came home at dawn after a dip in the pool. She came laughing home and woke me up. Popping-out eyes beneath white eyebrows turned on in spotlights of joy. The whole body covered in tiny prickles, blackish, coarse. Smile like a jasmine blossom on a face with hanging skin. Before I could say anything her arms were around me. After a long time happiness came to our home.

There was no happiness among the bosses of the Company. Terrible worry instead. The newspapers had flashed that because of the greed and shortsightedness of the Management a new species had completely died out. Our Sir sits on the bank of the pond with binoculars to see if he can spot any new life-bubbles. In the middle of this there was a leak in the factory's acid tank. Acid squirting everywhere like from a nozzle. An acid fountain. So many died, so many were blinded, so many had their skins shrivelled up. Acid fell on me too, but nothing happened to me. I calmly wiped off the acid with my bare hand. The company gave money to those who had lost eyes and so on but as nothing had happened to me, I got nothing. Then the company issued a circular saying that everyone should have a dip in the

Swapnamay Chakravarti / 117

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri breeding-pool and become like me. No one agreed. Said, "Let the job go, let's starve to death, but we won't become garden-lizards." Then the company said that in case such a thing happened again they would not offer wife had labour pains. She would have to be taken to hospital. Neighbours said, "No hospital will take this woman." The other pregnant women will have fits if they see her. What's to be done then? Get a midwife, I got a midwife. Seeing the patient the midwife said, "It isn't human, it's a female ghoul. I'll charge double for this mister." "Done", I said. The wife is moaning. I am turning into a father. A little later I heard crying, a baby crying The stop-work siren rang out in my heart. The midwife came out. Boy or girl? I asked. The midwife said, "First time in my life, I've assisted in the birth of a goblin. A ghoul breeding a goblin. Where's the cash?"

The boy had hanging skin. Little spikes all over. Eyes popping out of his head. The smile is stuck on my face. Neighbours come to see the goblin. The story has spread far and wide. All come to see the goblin. Early one morning my Sir's car too stopped before my house. Sir has come, Sir himself. I stop brushing my teeth and quickly put on the smiling mask. The wife pulls the end of her sari over her head.

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"Let's have a look at your son..." says Sir. I bring the child covered by a cotton wrapper. Sir removes the wrap. Sir looks at him close. Sir pinches the skin again and again, baby-skin. A sample, Sir is examining a sample. Sir is squeezing my son's skin, testing the hanging skin of the baby's face by rubbing two fingers on it on either side, like testing fabric. Sir smiles Says, "Ah! Then grows still. Eyes still, body still. Says like a slow chant "Eureka, eureka!...new birth, new species...Caraccass, new Caraccass..."

A piercing cry bubbles up within me. But even then my face smiles. My smiling face.

My smile.

Translated from Bengali by Bhaswati Chakravorty

Morninger

Amitabha Dev Choudhury

ome morning, the impatient knock rains on the door. It has become Jan everyday affair. A new irritant one can hardly ignore. It would not stop till I leave my bed to respond. If allowed to continue, it would spoil the sweet morning slumber of the neighbourhood. It's better, instead, to open the door. As you open the door, a human figure would emerge before you. Hair twisted like a rope, wrinkles everywhere in the face, shrunk skinsall suggest that the heyday of this person is gone. Wilderness haunts her open eyes. Hard to figure out whether it's a male or a female. The white piece of cloth wrapped around is the only testimony to her by-gone femininity. Neither masculine nor feminine, she is beyond such attributes. Just homo sapiens. Merely a human being. We call her 'Masi,' the old aunt. Even the kids in the neighbourhood who should be her grandson or granddaughter also call her Masi. I told her umpteen times not to wake me up so early. Everyone back home is utterly annoyed with her. But who cares? Our Masi is oblivious of the world around her. She belongs to a different world altogether.

At the slightest provocation, she would start narrating the forgotten history of this urban Silchar. A period, when the horse races used to take place in the vast green beside the Trunk Road. The ground was much larger then. The cluster of buildings and other signs of urbanity around the ground were non-existent. In the winter, the Europeans used to erect tents at this place. Basking in the soft sunshine, the ladies would join them in the revelry. Dancing, drinking and wild merry-making were interspersed by wet nostalgia for the homeland they had left behind. Needless to mention, Masi can hardly be expected to be coherent in telling her tales. This story is derly dialogues and my acquaintance with the history of this town. Masi says that once she saw a horse-ridden ghost of a European who was

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beheaded. That happened one moonlit night. I wonder whether what is beheaded. That happened revealed of this frontier town's past, of the British era, did really exist in revealed of this months to be? Her wrinkled skin and outward appearance he around seventy five, which means it generally suggest her to be around seventy five, which means it could be a story of 1936-37. Moreover, how could she be at Silchar at that period? Then, when was she on the other side, that is, in East Bengal? Was it Then, when was site of Bangladesh or precisely, Sylhet? The soil where she is determined to be when she breathes her last? It may be a possibility that those two different times live together in Masi's memory. Somehow two different histories are jux. taposed in Masi's imagination. Did she see these events during the British era with her own eyes? Or is it that she actually heard these stories somewhere? All those that had gone through her ear were reborn in her reminiscences as her own eyewitness accounts.

Waking up in utter disgust, I discover that it is just five on the clock. I was busy in examining answer scripts and preparing my class lecture, till late last night. It was half past midnight when I went to bed. However, these don't figure in Masi's priorities. Long back, just at the stroke of dusk on the previous day, she went to sleep after having her meal with the eatables doled out in the Kali temple of the locality, unrolling a worn out wrapper and a mosquito net, kept rolled during daytime, in the prayer hall of the temple. Now waking up to her call, I would discover that all her morning preoccupations - washing, bathing and managing a breakfast - are already over. The Kali Temple of the locality has a sprawling compound with outhouse, guesthouse, pond, and tube well and a host of other amenities. Everyone in this neighbourhood has a strong faith in the divine power of the idol in the temple. During the annual worship, a huge congregation of devotees takes place every year. Seven months ago, when Masi, bereft of any belonging and without a destination to go to, came down drifting along the turbulence of her life, to this locality, we took the initiative of convincing the priest and the members of the managing committee to arrange her night stay and food in the temple. A large section of the residents of this locality are basically the destitute refugees from East Bengal who settled here in the wake of the great exodus of 1947 that followed the Partition. The past generations of many of these residents had reached this town of Silchar after they were rendered hapless in East Bengal. This is history. To many, it was the attainment of Independence of motherland. To most, it was synonymous with the withering away of the ancestral home. It's no wonder that the siblings that the siblings of the once-destitute would empathize with another helpless soul. Therefore, with hardly any difficulty, we could fetch old pillows and worn out mattrees. worn out mattress and mosquito nets for her as alms from every household. For her food, there For her food, there was the customary daily offering at the temple. Whatever

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was available as offering sufficed her meagre need for meals. Most of the was available temple provided rice offerings. In the evening, occasionally, it days, the complete semolina cakes or sago pastes; or else, it would be the traditional would be the traditional preparation of fruit cocktails. The temple-door shut down immediately after the evening prayer and in tune with that the sleeping hour of Masi would begin. Early to bed and early to rise,' characterised her daily life.

Ultimately, I open the door daily. What's up, Masi?' I attempt to frown as usual, and fail. The Kali temple, facing my door or the field beside or Dwiju's tiny shop — all seemed to be still immersed in deep slumber. The reluctant sunrays of monsoon might shine today. The sky above is more or less clear. Manish Uncle, Soumen Sir, Jaganmoy Uncle — the retired seniors of the locality are busy with their daily schedule of morning walk. No one ventures too far. The junction at a little distance where this lane meets the main thoroughfare, is their limit. Just three or four rounds along this stretch suffice their daily quota of morning stroll. The neighbours wake up by the time their walk is over. Dwiju's employee who sleeps in the outlet does his morning-wash and prepares to light the stove.

I stare at Masi's vacant eyes. I find a mirror there. Is it in her eyes or in my imagination? 'Did anything progress, my son, regarding my going across the border? For God's sake, please let me have a glimpse of my homeland. Once, at least. It keeps haunting me all the time.' As if a mirror opens in her eyes. Images fade in. That of lush green fields, the vast horizon, the endless expanse of water, the full-grown ears of corn bent downward in the vast open golden fields, the archetypal dwellings of rural Bengal, the big ponds, the clamouring fish, the village-barns spilling the overflowing reserve of harvest, the rostrum of the holy herb of basil, an elder, wearing a pair of wooden sandals, strolling in the yard, hookah in hand. An elder, or an old canopy of banyan tree living through ages? A seamless spectacle of the eternal Bengal. The imaginary sketches of my homeland piled up over a long period of time in the sublime interior of my mind. I was born here. Long before my birth, in the fifties, my father's family had to flee their homeland with whatever little belonging they could fetch along and simply to survive, had to cross the border. Freedom which partitions one's homeland and renders crores of innocents' homeless was gifted to our earlier generation. Masi's homeland thus became my own homeland too. The lost homeland which lives underneath my consciousness for years.

I try to console her: I will take care of everything, Masi. But you need to give a little time for that. Why do you turn so impatient every morning?' May be her homeland beckons her in her sleep. The irrepressible of her own abode! May be the musings of nocturnal dreams chase her to our doorstep daily at the stroke of dawn. It turns her utterly

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emotional. May be, what night unfolds in her mind earlier fades out in the emotional. May be, what higher emotions at our door in the inertia of that spell intensity of the daylight. Masi knocks at our door in the inertia of that spell intensity of the daylight. May be I don't understand her emotions, but the lifeless wooden doors of my house surely empathize with her and feel gratified.

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I feel, what I say in meaningful words to her are nothing but empty promises. For both the countries on the two sides of the barbed wire, she is merely a waste. Once she made an attempt to slip in to the other side. It was an incident that happened three months back. Actually, some of us raised money for her passage and for other meagre logistics. But Masi couldn't make the trip. The kingpin of the clandestine transportation denied her a passage without paying heed to her desperate prayer, dissatisfied with the amount of money she was prepared to pay for the service. Perhaps they too considered her a waste, not qualified enough to swindle even. All her mad cries fell on their deaf ears only. Can an old one, whose ultimate voyage is so imminent afford a dream of changing his or her country?

Yes, it's hardly deniable that Masi is a waste. Even at this temple, she is not worthy of providing any service. She can somehow wash her enamel tumbler, plate and clothes only. Masi is really a waste. One who can no longer deliver anything, either physically or mentally, is surely a spent human being a waste only. A useless entity, though her heart exists. When the physical structure fails to drag on, heart spills life. It's true for our Masi too. Essentially, Masi is governed by her emtions only. Her homeland, the indomitable obsession in her to go across the border, all lives in her heart.

Of late, Masi has developed a new mania. She has procured an old, black leather bag. It's rusty and the zip fastener doesn't work. Masi collects all varieties of torn papers and keeps them in the bag with a lot of care. Her interest mainly centres around those torn papers which bear some kind of resemblance to official documents. For example, receipts or bills with faint impressions of official stamps. Needless to say, all of them are rejected and trash but Masi collects them as her treasured belonging from the dusty roads, the backyard of the school and from the lawns of the houses of this locality. For me, it has become almost a habit to follow Masi's trail very closely. I noticed with the eye of a sleuth that Masi never picks up shrivelled up papers. This mania has developed in Masi after her vain attempt of crossing the border stealthily. The necessity of possessing a passport or visa might have fallen faintly in her ear during those days. She cannot make out what exactly all large on the control of the contr what exactly did those words mean, but the faint memory haunts her. On her return for the same words mean, but the faint memory haunts her. her return from Karimganj, the neighbouring town of Silchar, Masi asked me, 'my son, everyone says, I shall have to procure some papers to go to my homeland. Why don't you get those for me?' Though I take all the trouble to calm her down with a variety of fictitious excuses, the rest of

the people shouldered the responsibility of your food and shelter. What else do you shouldered to be in any greater

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shouldered. What else do you want? We are not interested to be in any greater trouble for you.' Yet, many laugh at her instead. Why not? Everyone cannot be assumed to be living laugh at the laugh at the realm of emotions. The maniac persuasion of Masi which we were in the realm of emotions then Docard discussing earlier, began since then. Does that mean that Masi assumes that all these torn papers are her passport and visa, the usual documents needed all these to go across? Does Masi, a waste, regard these piles of waste papers as It doesn't evoke laughter in me. Doesn't cause any anger either. I feel

deeply sad. I don't know why it awakens in me memories of my mother. My mother too, during the last years of her life, used to yearn for her homeland all the time. 'For God's sake, please take me to my homeland. Just for once. I want just a glance of my ancestral abode.' In reply, I had only false promises to offer as consolation. Reminiscences of childhood used to flash up. Though my mother spent half of her life in this part of the border, I wonder, after these long years, why this soil couldn't become her own. The search for one's homeland eventually becomes synonymous with the longing for one's childhood. Isn't it a familiar adage that in old age a man enters his second childhood?

Often, a sense of being waste develops in me also. I can't keep pace with the jet speed of the time. Whole world races forward leaving me limping far behind. I too, like to go back to the days of childhood. I want to escape from the contemporary time which hinges on Television, Satellite channels, Internets, Hi-tech advertisements, STD's, PCO's, the nonsense technologies of hotel management and business management, this neverending rat race. I like to be in past, in my childhood. In the Lantern-lit nights of fables and fairy tales. In the noisy greens and in child like adventures. I long to go to the days of fleeing the frowning class rooms to the freedom of football and cricket matches. Can one go down to past? Can by mere change of place one can go back to past? What Masi is searching is essentially a magic-key of altering her time. But the time she is madly after, had withered away from this planet long back.

I ask, 'Do you have acquaintances there, Masi?' An assured Masi says, All of my relations live there! My father, my mother, my son.' It's yet another tiddle in Masi's conversation. She has lost her senses about time. May be on being outlived, or being a destitute far away from her own self over the years, she turned uprooted from her memory too. What used to be her past has become current. The dead seem to have become alive again in her life. Once she said that she was never married. On another occasion she said she was married here, on this side of the border. Yet some other

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time again, she shifts her venue of marriage to the other side of the border, she claims now lives across the border, she claims now lives across the border, she claims now lives across the border. time again, she shirts her too. She has a son who now lives across the border, she claims. During too. She has a son who now lives across the border, she claims. During too. She has a soil will the Partition of this country (Masi refers to it as holocaust), she lost her tale is that, consequent on that it mother. Another version of her tale is that, consequent on that, all of them had crossed over to this country. In a different version, she claims that she had been smuggled in to this country by two persons along with hordes of others to work as a contract labourer. Elsewhere I had heard of similar of others to work as a seven assembly constituencies in the district of incidents earlier. There are seven assembly constituencies in the district of Cachar, viz, Silchar, Sonai, Dholai, Katigorah, Barkhola, Lakhipur and Udharbond. Even in the remote areas of these segments, cheap labouters were made available by smuggling in the poor from Bangladesh. Masons, brick workers, work force used in casting reinforced cement concreteall of them belonged to the same group of smuggled labourers. These havenots who escaped from the other side in search of a little happiness or were allured to this land were employed for meagre wages. I don't know whether the legacy continues or not.

Masi probably had come to this land much before Partition. She was in a variety of work or may be she was pushed to different occupations. She might even have had to sell her chastity too. She never speaks of her young age. In her old age, she was employed in house-hold works in a well-to-do family. It's a remote village on the other bank of the Barak, far from Silchar. After she became too aged to work, the master turned her out. Treading the rough terrains of life since then, Masi finally reached our locality, in the temporary shelter of the Kali Temple. But Masi still cherishes a dream of having a permanent shelter and which is why she wants to move further.

Finally, a morning dawned without a knock at my door. On that fateful morning no one in our locality could trace her. For a few days more, she figured in all the chit-chats and conversations. Over cups of tea in the tea stalls, in the usual pleasantries in the grocery shops, in the gossips of the young, in the intermittent small-talk in the card playing sessions, in the liquor den after the dusk—everywhere, Masi's sudden disappearance was the only news. Like everything else, all the sensations surrounding Masi had a natural demise. Everyone eventually got bogged down into their own engagements. The young ones with their school and college. The grown-ups in their usual race to their offices and establishments. The women-fok went in to their kitchens or out to offices. And the old ones boozed in the card playing or chess sessions. There were preoccupations like morning walk, noontime nap, gastric trouble, coughs, spondilitis or spasms, diabetes or blood pressure to keep the others obsessed. The aggregate of all these anxieties pushed Masi into oblivion. Initially, I felt pity. I had a strange feeling anxieties pushed Masi into oblivion. Initially, I felt pity. I had a strange feeling

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for a different reason too. She, who was the spoiler of my early morning for a difference and therefore an utterly annoying existence as far as I was conslumber and sense of bereavement, instead of relief, after suddenly cerned, gave me a sense of bereavement, instead of relief, after suddenly cerned, gave nowhere along with her small bundle of meagre belongings. For the next two days, I woke up early on my own. As if I was in desperately for the least through my sleep for Masi's call. As Masi was no longer there to awaiting the was no longer there to wake me up, my sleep overtook me and I woke up late. Almost till 9'o wake life up, according to the dishes for hardly found any time to go to the market. So, in effect, the dishes for lunch and supper tasted less delicious. On one or two occasions I arrived late at school for which I had to swallow the mild admonition of my Vice-Principal. All these events repeatedly reminded me of Masi.

Nowadays my wife has taken the responsibility of waking me up at 7'0 clock in the morning. She does it simply by pushing me out of sleep. As part of my daily itinerary, I go to the market with a bag in my hand. Spend time in idle chat with the neighbours. During this period we, the teachers, were on strike in our school. Later on, I had some busy days in helping my daughter prepare her class assignment of project work. In the same chain of events, I took part in a protest march against the communal carnage in Gujarat. There were some cultural events in the District Library Auditorium of the town. I took my wife and kids to enjoy those. After a long, one-month gap, I spent considerable time in a long session of chat at Dwiju's stall. That happened one evening recently. There was a little booze as well. Time rolled by quite fast and along with that Masi slipped out of my mind.

All on a sudden it was yesterday, in the darkness of the night that I happened to see Masi again. In Karimganj, the neighbouring border town of Silchar, where the embarkation to the other side of the international border takes place across a river, Masi stands alone with her old, black, torn out, zip-less leather bag in hand in front of the sentries of the border post. I saw her showing the torn out waste papers one by one to the stoic sentries. A waste, exhibiting all the waste papers as her testimonials. These are her Passport, her visa to go across. Piles of waste papers, slipping out of her hand overcast the entire surrounding. Soon, more and more waste papers start flying in from different directions to join their brethren. A huge avalanche of waste papers is falling on the river-bank. A thunderstorm of Waste papers is enveloping the entire sky. Testimonials of a whole waste population, from all the places, who are bereft of any identity or lineage, ate toaring along on the river bank. In this whirlpool of waste papers, totating, are their dreams and their memories of lost time. From thousands to millions, from millions to crores, they are spiraling incomprehensibly. The

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Character is drowning the incessant shower of waste dreams and waste memories is drowning the river-bank. The unending piles of waste papers have wrapped the soil in river-bank. The unchang relative seems numbed. There have been a

all, it seems.

It woke me up. After long days, Masi again knocks at my door. How can I not respond to her? Struggling out of the inertia of long sleep, I go out in to the open. Sporadic clouds of late monsoon are hanging around in the sky. Residues of late night showers are visible here and there. The leaves in the tree, the potholes on the street, the grass-shoots in the green —all bear the memory of the downpour of the last night. See! How the raindrop on the grass-end is frozen like morning dew. I rush to take a glimpse of the wonder. Yes! This is my homeland, my own soil. Eternal Embodiment of my soul! My beloved nest of tranquility! My dream! My memory! My credential! I never had the opportunity to look at her. For years, for ages, it seems, I haven't seen my own mother-soil. The greens beneath my feet, the sky over my head, the breeze murmuring in my ears, the watering monsoon shower, the huge trees, the small grass were nowhere in my vision. But today after ages, I could take a full view of the canvas. Have I seen it on my own? Or Masi, our old beloved forgotten Masi, has displayed it for me?

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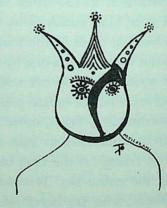
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Translated from Bengali by Subha Prasad Nandi Majumdar



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Jhumur Pandey

Canka's five feet body lay on a torn blanket. She was dead. Her left hand was teeming with flies and that's why it looked like the thigh. Both the eyes were shut. Some clothes were hanging from a string in front of an apartment without windows. Some stale rice in a plate. A cat was sniffing at it. Some glass vessels and bowls were scattered here and there. Some potted herbs were kept in a corner of the room. The black pet dog of Sanka was lying near the door. This sight attracted the notice of Lakshmi first. Lakshmi was passing by to fetch water from the spring. Having found the door open, she peeped into the room purposelessly, called Sankabhaji by name and said, "Are you going to stay inside the house today?" Getting no response, Lakshmi went inside the room and she was taken aback when she touched Sanka's body. Who knows when she had died! Lakshmi gazed at the deceased Sanka for sometime with still eyes. Then taking a cloth from above the rope, she covered the body. A thrilling fear snatched Lakshmi away from the room. Lakshmi sat on the grass under the jarul tree that bore plenty of violet flower. Tears rolled down her eyes. She didn't wipe them off. The parched lips tasted salty. Lakshmi knew that it might happen one day. A bird flew away from the jarul tree with a flap of its wings. Underneath, in the watery land, there were clusters of creepers and edible aquatic plants. One or two cranes flying. A gallinule was sitting idle. Earlier there was a big marshy land at that place. Here water used to overflow. Waterillie's and their stalks used to draw attraction of many a man. It was said that fairies used to come in a body attracted by the scent of flowers. Though Lakshmi didn't see any fairies yet in her childhood days, when she used to come for taking the stalks of the water-Lily, she would spit at the breast following her mother's instruction.

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Lakshmi felt inclined to laugh away when she recollected it now People have dried up the water now by building dykes. Here and there done Even then, people quarelled over the People have dried up and there some cultivation was done. Even then, people quarelled over the share of the dry portion of the land. Lakshmi had seen all these. A few water drops descended her forehead having fallen from the tree overhead Lakshmi wiped them with a portion of her cloth and looked at the road. Nobody was to be seen. Some urchins were catching the crabs, rummaging through their burrows. Lakshmi signalled them to come over. The boys came upto Lakshmi.

"What?"

"Do you know that Sankabhaji has passed away?"

"She should die," one of the boys said callously.

"What do you mean?"

"Pisha has beaten her severely yesterday on the hand where she has the wound."

"He has beaten her on the day before her death?"

"Sanka pishi couldn't cut the wood yesterday and Pisha also drank heavily."

"Right, hurry and inform others."

"Is there any one in any house now?" The boys look amazedly, Everyone has gone to work. Don't you see that so many hours of the day has passed already?"

I know. I tell you to go all the same. I'll be here.

The boys spoke with one another and exchanged the looks and disappeared from the place making strange sounds with their mouth.

Lakshmi again sat against the jarul tree. She was afraid to get into the room. Lakshmi was around twenty and Sanka must have been forty. There was a great difference between twenty and forty. Yet how such a friendship grew between them was a puzzle for Lakshmi. Nobody knew what had happened to Sanka's hand. Pus tricked, bad odour spread. Nobody drew close to Sanka. People would keep their handkerchiefs to their nostrils whenever they noticed Sanka. Sanka also kept away from others. Yet she used to cut wood with this hand the whole day. She used to buy rice after selling the wood at dusk. Yet she used to be beaten up by her husband. That fellow was almost inhuman. Sanka had gone to hospital the doctor had examined her hand with due care and prescribed a medicine. She had given the doctor ten rupees in the hospital. This money she had saved by keeping it inside a bamboo cylinder. But where could all where could she get the money to purchase the medicines with? Many advise her to go to the Medical college. "Go to the Medical College

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will be required." But could she go to the Medical College iust by boarding the bus? She couldn't. She got off the bus after observing the disturbed looks of the face of the passengers and hearing their passing the disturbed home bearing a pile of fresh insults and tearful remarks. She returned home bearing a pile of fresh insults and tearful eyes. From then on, she wouldn't go anywhere. She used to go from the house to the jungle and badi. But Lakshmi, ignoring the foul smell, the nouse to Sanka. Sanka used to say, "All including my sister keep away from me whenever they see me but why do you come to me?" "I don't feel well if I don't see you."

"Don't you find any foul smell?"

"No."

"Will you tell me the way towards death?"

"Do you want to die?" Lakshmi said after heaving a sigh.

"What's the use of this painful life?"

"I know. I can understand."

"My mental pain is much more than the bodily one." Sanka falteringly said.

"Yet I've to live with this pain in body and mind in this filthy society.

"There's none to weep after my death. Will you weep?"

"I'll cry, I'll cry. Lakshmi said with her eyes full of glistening tears. Sanka's father was a cultivator part of the day and for the rest he was a day labourer. Yet there was happiness in Sanka's father's house. Sanka wore bangles all over her hands when she used to go to the fair with her father. Sanka observed Tusu. What a pleasure father would derive then! She would rejoice all night long with friends taking haria on the night before Tusu. Sanka would play Tusu's mother. On the day of jagaran, they would fast all day and taking a mixture of milk and rice in the night itself, the girls of the neighbourhood used to sing Tusu songs. The following day, that is, on the day of festivities, Sanka, used to immerse Tusu in the river after carrying it on her head from one house to another singing Tusu numbers.

Lakshmi's tears got dried up. The bird again sat over the branch of the jarul tree. Where did the gallinule go? Gangamani, while passing along the road below asked her, "Lakshmi, what are you doing here?"

"What should I say! Sankabaji has passed away."

"She died? It is better that she died because she had so much to suffer. Where's her husband?"

"Where are you going?"

"Don't say anything more, I'm going to the Panchayat."

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master?"

r?" "Though I've won, but the master has again appealed to the judge's court."

"His desires are not yet fulfilled?"

"How can it be? When can their desires be fulfilled?

"My own land, I'm ready to fight for it?"

A small boy, all of a sudden cried aloud while catching the crabs. Both of them looked at the direction, startled.

Gangamani wiped out the perspiration from her cheek with a portion of his attire.

"Did you inform others?"

"I've," Lakshmi said.

"I can't stay. Tomorrow is my hearing. I'll board a vehicle on the way to Panchayat's house. I'll not be able to appear at the right time if I don't go a day earlier to the town."

"Go as you've nothing to do here."

Gangamani departed. Lakshmi thought she should put an end to all the devils in a day. She taught Ashimbabu's son a good lesson the day before yesterday. He used to follow Lakshmi for some days. She was taking dry wood from the jungle on that day. She stood up frightened when she heard a hissing sound from the dense bush near a marsh. Ramu came out from the bush. Lakshmi, keeping the pile of wood away, stood up against Ramu. Then she fixed her eyes on him.

"Tell me why did you follow me?"

"That, that....I like you very much."

"It matters little if you like me. Will you marry me? Will you put a vermilion mark on my forehead in the presence of others?"

"No, No, how it can be?"

"How it can be?" repeating it, Lakshmi threw a threatening look at Ramu.

"Listen, I'll give you money and sari."

"Do you tempt me?" Her stare became more intense. "Listen, we are labourers, we've better self-respect than you have. Do you follow?"

Taking out a dazzling knife from the pile of wood, she threw it at Ramu. She strode off with the bundle of firewood on her head. Lakshmi saw Ramu enter Nabin's shop dragging his injured leg that morning. Lakshmi hated this filthy society. The prime enemy of man

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was the man who made this world filthy. Why do people spread scandalous rumour about others? To ruin others? Lakshmi didn't understand how people got amusement doing so. Lakshmi had heard some country was people go type of bomb had been made that could kill people without disturbing anything around. To fulfil their foul desires they throttle people disturbing What a strange world! Lakshmi felt a great pain in her chest. Why didn't man look at the flowers? Why don't they listen to the chirping of birds and look at the moving clusters of clouds? Lakshmi was reminded, all of a sudden of a face a fair complexioned, unblemished face. It seemed Lakshmi would remember that face throughout her life. Who knew wherefrom that stranger had come. Lakshmi liked that person very much. As much as she liked flowers, moonlight, hillocks. The stranger said, "What do you like?"

"Flowers, hills, rivers, springs."

"And."

"And genuine persons."

"Do you know man undergoes great sufferings."

"Sufferings?"

"Yes great sufferings."

"One day the suffering will cease."

"Will it cease? How?"

There was a great deal of happiness in Lakshmi's simple eyes. That stranger, fixing his look on her simple eyes said, "A day will come when everyone's hands are clenched." Lakshmi found the proposition hard. While departing the stranger said, "I am going."

"Please come again."

"Why."

"I don't know."

The stranger sighed and left. Whenever the pain in Lakshmi's chest increased that immaculate face appeared to her. Her pain also subsided then.

Midday appeared to come to an end. The sunlight also looked like an elderly pale woman. In the marshy land below there was gloominess all over like in Lakshmi's heart. Fluttering their wings the cranes went flying. The kingfisher sat idle with the pain of getting nothing.

Some persons gathered and built a machan with bamboos. Sanka's man was there. Lakshmi sat and noted all these. Her heartache increased with the sounds of the cutting of bamboos. Lakshmi thought sometime later Sankabhaji would be kept upon the machan and carried by all persons present there to the cemetary. They would dig the burial pit and put

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Sankabhaji would never come getting off the l her into it. Weeus would never come getting off the bus. She

Everybody will die one day. Why man can't die peacefully? Who knows when the people will have their hands clenched? Tears from Lakshmi's eyes tickled down her dark cheeks. Her parched lips tasted salty again.

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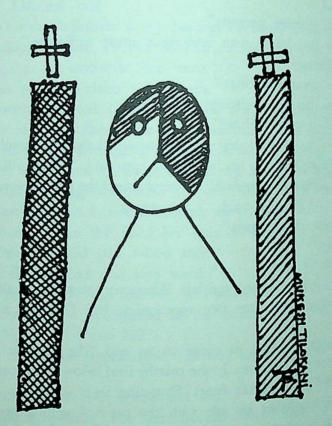
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The Green Motorbike

Kumar Ajit Dutta

At long last the waiting game was over. Today also the old-fashioned green motorbike halted near their 16 Alpine Road bungalow, in the lean shade of the *Chhatim** tree. The mid-day sun was pouring down fire. And Bipasa did not know if the sun so fiercely scorched some other place too. As if it was this rider who everyday churned the blue sky to bring down the blistering fury on Chandmari.

He stopped the motorbike in his own usual heroic style. Halting screechily, his helmeted head stared into her. He slowly took out the helmet and released a meaningful simper. This was a daily event Bipasa would witness. And she knew that he came only for her. The rider appeared energetic, a young man sporting a chiselled French-cut beard and long hair like the Hollywood studs. A smile was writ large on his face as he rode his bike to his customary halt in the shade.

Just at that moment everyday Bipasa would stand on the balcony watching the young man stop his famous bike and flaunt his expressive body language. She wondered if he knew about her—that she was the wife of such a well-known architect. Or that her six-year old daughter Rai, now away at school, and her six-month old tiny son Babai, now lulled to sleep, would make her cup of joy full. The maroon door-screen flapped innocently as Bipasa's mind fluttered to the thought.

Precisely at that point a huge airbus screeched over her head. The airport being too near, she witnessed many a noisy flight and descent of planes. May be this airbus was flying away to an unknown remote land!

The young man steadily dismounted from the green motorbike and kept gazing at her. Bipasa silently admired the appeal of his girlish complexion, his magnetic twinkling eyes. She was gradually being lost in a flash of his captivating appeal.

chhatim tree : seven-leaf tree

But soon she allowed good sense to prevail on her...wasn't she someone's wife...Why should she even dream of a forbidden thought...with a desperate effort to settle herself, with scars of shame and self-contempt unsettling her, Bipasa shuffled quickly back behind the maroon door-screen leaving the noon scorch itself.

On an idle noon, a dove was screaming from within some shrubs around the pond nearby. Bhola who had gone out making the excuse of visiting a relative was not to be seen around. Even overseeing his daily chores would have helped move the clock forward. Little Babai was still sleeping would sleep through the day. In the night, he would play with his own little limbs, play other mysterious games, talk a language very much his own, pee into the bed. The night would also see him explode into a cry and then lapse into sleep when occasionally he might smile to some unknown joy.

Bipasa glanced at the watch. Twenty minutes past noon. Wondered what Amitabha was upto in the office. She took the cell phone and let her lazy noon ring into his ears:

"Mr. Sengupta, are you still on the laptop?"

"Babai is still sleeping, it seems...

Amitabha's voice was tinged-with broad smiles.

"Yes, I won't wake him up. Let him wake on his own."

I am planning to take you out on a trip for somedays. Be off from tedium!" Amitabha spoke seriously.

"Hmm! Your fussy boss will mess up all plans. He'll keep nagging over the phone. The whole trip will be a spoiled. A bachelor as he is he has a lot more to learn. He won't understand the intricacies of a married life." Bipasa's voice blended anger and misgiving.

On the other end, Amitabha allowed her to release a sentiment not aimed at him, but wearing a smile, gifted his wife a well-intentioned suggestion: "Dear, look for a friend somewhere. Someone who will talk your noon through and drive away your langour."

"Cracked enough jokes..." Bipasa spoke languidly in an impatient tone.
"No dear, no. I'm cracking no jokes. I'm dead serious. Who knows that a Prince Charming might soon be standing beneath the lonely chhatim tree." His smiles lingered.

For a while Bipasa was benumbed with amazement. Had he really hinted at the game played out daily? If so, was he a prophet?

From the other side, Amitabha was growing restless, for that spell of amazement kept her silent. She settled down and cautiously breathed out:

"Your jokes escape me. Leave them aside. Hear me...Office over, promptly come home please..."

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"Hi, dear, before that beat the noon heat, raze it. Soon the lost horizon will bloom before your eyes. I want to see you pluck that life. Have patience, he is coming soon... Your Prince..."

"Jokes again!"

Bipasa took no time to snap the phone as a seeming challenge to Amitabha's teasing eloquence.

Once again she was deep down in loneliness, in a weary passivity. Though nothing serious, at least the chit-chat with Amitabha took away some of the tedious moments. She intensely felt the pangs of passivity, the pain of not doing anything. But her mind shifted from thought to thought. What was Rai doing in the school? Nagging the aunties? Probably teachers enjoyed her antics. Antics of a child who topped the class in practically everything—studies, quiz, recitation, drawing and in Tagore songs as well. But she would return at 2-30. Still some time left.

The computer was on and some images kept flashing on the screen. Amitabha was to meet some order for graphics. He kept certain outlines in the file but he had still to work on them. About colours, about shapes. Once he took on graphics as a passion, now it had changed into almost a profession. Bipasa fiddled with this thing and that, showing her acute loneliness as something more than the finicky care of a housewife. She dragged on. Minutes became hours for her.

She switched off the computer and stood near the bookshelf along the broad wall of the room, looking into rows of knowledge and imagination Amitabha had piled up over the years. Their sight was as good as feeling his presence in her company. She smilingly remembered his dreamy talk, brooding, what it took to be real: "After retirement, life will begin with these books. Both for you and for me. The children will find their own pastures in the States or Australia. Only you and me will be there. I shall read out to you and you, to me. We shall be plunged in a world of our own..."

Amitabha's reverie would often be endless, it went on as a spool of thread would, while flying a kite!

Bipasa could remember her father's study at their Madhupur house. In the midst of the rows of books, he would read, write and think. May be most of the books were related to Economics, her father's chosen subject. But he loved fiction too. So there were touches of Tagore, Saratchandra, Bibhutibhusan, Premchand, Renu and Mulk Raj Anand as well.

She had, however, a different shelf mostly consisting of anthropology books. But she kept copies of Svar Beetan and Geet Beetan too. Occasionally her brother Dhananjoy would gift her Hindi books and they found a space in her brother Dhananjoy would gift her Hindi books and they found a space in her shelf. She was more at home in Hindi than in Bengali. At Madhupur,

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she had to communicate in Hindi in her circles and the fact that she was she had to communicate in educated in Hindi medium sharpened her Hindi a great deal. There the educated in Hindi medium sharpened her Hindi a great deal. There the Bengali schools must now be ghostly ruins. But she picked up some Bengali Bengali schools must now be garden and her love for Tagore songs also was due

Amitabha would often brag about his collection in the shelf. "All are best sellers," he boasted. She curiously flipped through a few of them. But she realized that they needed more than a working knowledge in Bengali. She got an assurance from Amitabha that a teacher would be employed to help her hone her language. And this would lessen her boredom to some degree too. But she had it the back of her mind that Amitabha was not serious that he was only joking as usual.

From Madhupur Bipasa had brought a trunkful of anthropology books. Her husband arranged them with much care and boastfully told his friends about her academic achievements, about her being a Ph.D. Bipasa with a doctorate degree and knowledge of computer, could have earned a job for sure. But her architect husband was against this move: "My income is not on the lower side. Why should you strains yourself for some money? As long as I am there, you needn't think...I am there to see to your needs.

Bipasa glanced over her books in the shelf and in a sudden flash of imagination thought that they were being suffocated. She quickly opened the door of the shelf and allowed air caress the books. Amitabha indeed took an extra care of the books, particularly Bipasa's. Every week he brushed and dusted-them, and sprinkled a fistful of worm-repelling tablets inside the shelf.

Then came a discovery. Bipasa swooped on to photo album lying among the books, an album she brought from Madhupur. It was fading and time-beaten, but for her it was so invaluable. She took it, sat gently by her sleeping Babai and gently opened it. Photos of her bygone days, of her parents and brother Dhananjoy gave her nostalgic thrills. She was lost in her playful memories. As if suddenly the album took on wheels of a motorbike, a green motorbike...roaming back in time!

When time moved forward the door bell rang. Anticipating it was Bhola, Bipasa dashed to the door to open it. But she was stunned to silence. It was that Green Bike young man mischievously smiling. She fumbled for words, choked by confusion. But he softly began: "Will you drive me from the door or call me in?" Without awaiting her words, he slipped past her into the room. She was silent and perplexed, her energy seemed to sap.

The young man advanced forward near the bed where little Babai was peacefully asleep. "Oh how sweet! Your baby is so innocently sleeping," he said before settling on the sofa. The green of the bike appeared to stretch

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across his whole body. With her heart beating fast, she, as a cautionary step, sat on the bed besides the sleeping child.

With smiles painted all over his face, he said, "Rai is in the school, isn't she?" These words gave Bipasa the creeps. He had all information and what design did he have....She brooded restlessly.

He had a fibre carrybag with him. He plunged his hand into it, brought out a teddy-bear, kept it on the centre table and said: "This one is for your Babai." He repeated the act_and brought out a Barbie doll. "This one is for Rai." Finally he brought out a book, flipped through it from cover to cover leisurely and staring into her eyes said: "You are from Madhupur. Your Hindi is good, but you are a Bengali. The language is as beautiful as Bengali women. So this Bengali book is yours. A recent novel. It will be a good read." He kept it softly on the computer table.

The young man's action more than bewildered her. All her calculations went awry. How could one offering gifts have a negative intention? She mused. But at the same time she thought the opposite as well-it could be a device to conquer her, a first step into her heart. She silently vowed not to be won over in any way. She promised to be inwardly stern. She settled into her seat in a rigid pose.

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The young man breathed out rubbing his rather girlish face with a handkerchief whipped out from his pocket. Bipasa's suspicion grew at the word boutthan. She was now certain that he had a stealthy plan to soften her heart. She stuck to her resoluteness not to give in, not to give him any space worth the name.

The young man continued: "Do you know, whenever the sun scorches the earth, I go wild. I feel pushed into some bondage. I can't explain what it is. But I go wild. I rush desperately out on the bike, aimlessly roaming across the town in some liberating joy...while I pass by your picturesque bunglow, I see you coldly slouching in the balcony. I somehow feel that you too are a victim of the hot noon. I stare at you, for I. have always felt that only you may become my friend, philosopher and guide. Today's visit is only to convey my feeling to you."

As if to clear the cloud of misgiving in her mind, the young man Went on: "Please, do not take it otherwise. I need only friendship, pure friendship which moves on without change. Which knows no desire, no selfishness."

Bipasa's mind unfolded bit by bit, just like a flower does, petal by Petal. He began to seem different. Bipasa thought the young man was

boutthan: loving address for sister-in-law

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"Yes, let tea open our friendship," he replied.

As he spoke, his smiles became broader than ever before. Bipasa As he spoke, the state though consciously evading his notice. Bipasa managed a sneaking smile at last though consciously evading his notice. She managed a sneaking strands and leisurely moved from the drawing room to the bedroom, stood before the dressing table working on her saree and hair strands and leisurely moved into the kitchen. While tea was boiling, she stared outside into the sky only to find a bird soaring circularly, may be in thirst. That was a moment for her too to muse about the drama leading to her changing heart: "What has happened to me and why it has to happen with me? Why do I know the time when the green bike halts, in the shade? When the shade is lonely, why does my heart beat so restlessly? Then, have I become an unfaithful wife?"

These questions lingered in her heart. Bipasa did not know what answers would soothe her, but she knew that she was through a new territory of experience her heart had never probed before. She offered him tea and snacks, resisting from giving him the favourite snacks of Amitabha. She, however, had given much thought on possibility of giving her husband a ring. A ring about a tramp who had barged into their home. She decided against it. May be, she thought, that would be too much. There might be unnecessary public attention. Moreover, the young man looked to be innocent though outwardly streaks of eccentricity and desperation sat on his mien. And how could she deny his eyes which were like a deep blue

As Bipasa settled down and offered him the tray, the young man with his characteristic smile resumed: "Bouthan, tea's ready. But won't you want to know what my name is what clan, family, profession...."

"What may one ask of one who has forced into the house?"

"Oh, you think I'm a trickster, a bully? If so I must rush out. Yes, I must leave. Here I go."

"Don't worry. There's none in the house. As you see only I and my Babai are there."

Immediately, the youngman's smiles vanished and sullenly he popped out: "Bouthan, you're suspecting me!"

"This is quite natural. The opposite will be unnatural," she confidently ran on, "being someone's wife, how can I spend this scorching noon with vou?"

The youngman had no answer. His sullen face drooped. Bipasa knew what these words would sound like in his heart, how they would hurt him.

The young mean label. The young man laboured to his feet, gazed across the bookshelf and walked slowly towards the slowly towards the door looking out on the sun beating down relentlessly on the earth Bion the earth. Bipasa remained the silent onlooker for a moment. But then

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she spoke. "Why are you leaving so early? Seat yourself for a while more." she spoke. The young man kept walking towards the door and paused to answer. The young, this fiery noon has cheated me. I had better go out." As if there "No...ito, and there was nothing else to say, Bipasa asked him indifferently, "Will you ride that green bike?"

"Certainly," the young man hissed.

"In that express 80 kilometre speed?" she innocently asked.

"Yes, that speed suits me."

"Beyond the highway, will you go into some remote village?"

Yes, in a scorching day, where else to liberate myself?"

"Some green canal?"

"Yes."

"Through paddy greens?"

"Surely."

"Along some river banks?"

"There too."

"By some ancient ruins?"

"Yes, certainly."

The green bike hustled on through towns and villages, paddy greens, green canals and ancient ruins. The green bike merrily moved on. The young man and Bipasa on the pillion whizzing through the wind into some unknown landscape....

The cellphone rang and Bipasa's reverie screeched to a halt. Little Babai was innocently sleeping still. The maroon door-screen was dancing to the soft winds and the fan was whirring round as effortlessly as the sun. It was Amitabha on the phone again speaking out clichés which had little in themselves to move a woman who learnt to feel that the shade of a tree or the sun had more meaning for her life than she had ordinarily ever understood before.

She wontedly stood in the balcony, looked out into the noon smoking itself. And she watched the shade of the nearby tree grow more lean and lonely.

Translated from Bengali by Upal Deb

Ice Sahib's Daughter

Bimal Kar

"Well then listen to a story I'm going to narrate now," said Panchuda, the story is of that tender age when I too had been taken by a firm grip of that staunch sense of moral responsibility like you, Rasu, but to be fair, it is a tale of all men of all ages.

"We were three friends: Beeru, Teenu and I. We were hardly twelve or thirteen years of age at that time. We used to live at Dhanbad in the rail-quarters of Dompara. We used to stay at the Academy located at the Old Station.

Dompara was off beyond the Dhanbad Market. I used to stay in one of the blocks which stood in an array on the right-hand end at the entrance of that locality and in another stayed Teenu. Both of our fathers used to work with the Railways. Beeru's father used to serve in the most glitzy, posh, big foreign shop of the Dhanbad Market: Gregory Brothers. He used to stay in a rented apartment nearby. Mohit Uncle's occupation was not known to me but very often Beeru used to bring pocketful of lozenges, toffees, biscuits and a lot more of such things. And with loaded pockets we used to drop in at Ice Sahib's residence—to see Ice Sahib's daughter, Zinni.

Ice Sahib! Doesn't it sound a bit awkward to you? In those childhood days, when we first heard the name, it sounded queer to us even! When we came to know each other, began visiting each other, our intimacy got a fillip and that sense of queerness did not persist any further. And who named him 'Ice Sahib' hardly interested us, we were not willing even to investigate it anymore. Till date, we do not know his real name.

In our locality itself, towards the right on the way to the Joraphatak stood a tall white fence-walled, a gate-fitted large house. The house was an ice-mill. Inside the fence-wall, at one corner stood a small, tiled cottage,

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennal and eGangotri much like a country-bungalow. That hut too had a spire on it quite very much a church. Mostly moss-covered cross and a spire on it quite very much a church. Mostly moss-covered, creeper-laden remained the like that on a church alot many flowers blooming had seen a lot many flowers blooming. spire. We had seen a lot many flowers blooming on it.

We have Sahib used to reside in that house. In a trim and spruce, spick and span cottage. In the strip of small front lawn, varieties of flowers and span could bloomed with the change of seasons. The tub of croton stood on the bloomed with bloomed with the same in the tall of croton stood on the verandah. Only a single tub displayed Zinnia flowers. Speck-less white, a Sahib used to nurture God knew what with his own hand and went on blooming a single, solitary Zinnia flower in that tub through the year. One or two buds even! We had never seen a couple of flowers on that plant. Grapevine sources said, if ever two buds were about to sprout, he used to snip off one. What for, we knew not. Ice Sahib's daughter Zinnia, yes, lce Sahib's daughter was called Zinnia. We used to address her as Zinni while people called her only Ice Sahib's daughter. Zinni used to say that Ice Sahib used to send that single flower to her mother, far above in Heaven. We used to listen to her words in wide-eyed wonder and think that Ice Sahib certainly was well conversant in incantations.

God only knew what magic spell enveloped Ice Sahib's residence! Since morning the verandah of the house stood covered with soothing shadows, the wicker chairs and tables painted green slept hard all day long, the breeze made the curtains on the door swing to and fro, the parrot in the cage chirped at regular intervals and the hooting of the dove got wafted from far. The incessant buzz of the ice-mill too kept falling on the ears.

We three, Beeru, Teenu and I used to frequent that place everyday. lce Sahib was deeply fond of us. Small, stocky, round-faced, gray-haired man with ear-hugging pince-nez perched on his eyes. We still remember that Ice Sahib distinctly. As though, we were his friends or horde of grandchildren. If ever we had a football match on the Dompara ground, Ice Sahib used to donate half a chunk of ice from his ice-mill along with tentwelve bottles of lemonade!! He had bought us one silver cup. We played for that cup during football seasons. Ice Sahib stood at its helm. During the cricket season, he used to buy us - bat, wicket, ball - each and every item. Besides, in all matters he was ours! We used to perform Saraswati Puja. Ice Sahib subscribed ten rupees. He used to come in person to decorate the idol, during immersion, he used to accompany us before all. Ice Sahib's daughter Zinni used to come for offerings. The three of us got on with lce Sahib intimately at his residence. Whenever he had a little leisure, he used to play Ludo, Snake-ladder, Carrom or Horse-race with us and also a lot other games. He used to traipse out roping all of us through the paddyfields and the meadows leaving the ice-mill behind straight to Chandmari

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oraphatak house was ed cottage, which stood at the extreme end of the graveyard. We used to enjoy the race—Beeru, Teenu, Zinni and I. Ice Sahib waved his handkerchief to kick off a start to the game. We indulged in playing the blindman's buff. Almost always, Ice Sahib used to play the role of the thief. With his eyes folded have you gone? Teenu, I'll get hold of you now Zinni, Zinni, where is that

In the tete-a-tete sessions at Ice Sahib's house, we however did not get him all the time but Zinni was always there. Zinni used to keep waiting for us to drop in. She was a pal of our age. Her complexion took after the zinnia flower. Perhaps, that was why Ice Sahib had christened her as Zinnia, Zinni. Zinni had a tuft of shaggy mane cascading down her shoulders. How curly and soft! She had a bit longish face. She had large eyes with the eye balls a little tawny in hue. Zinni's cheek, lips used to glow crimson.

While losing at the game of Ludo, Zinni used to pick up an altercation with us, we kept ogling at her. She used to put on frocks, she owned a multi-hued collection of the same. And that light-pink silk socks which used to take the sweet milk-crimson hue, on getting blended with the colour of her soft milky-white legs.

Zinni was our playmate, a friend of all seasons—be it joyous or sad. We used to chat and gossip, play and eat together. Many a day, Beeru brought pocketsful of chocolates, Teenu unripe guavas and I tamarind pickle. Three of us kept our lozenges, guavas and tamarind-pickle down, in front of Zinni. Afterwards, we four used to partake of these eatables, perching under the verandah or beneath the shades of the creepers. Off and on, Zinni stuck out her tongue, puckered her face and eyes and said, 'How sour it tastes!'Beeru remarked, 'Superb!' Teenu exclaimed, 'Great!' and I sucked forth all the sour from Zinni's tongue to mine mentally and ejaculated, 'Grand!'

Such was our Zinni. She was a flower bloomed in the arbour of the mind of the three of us. We were mesmerized by her beauty, her fragrance, her antics—we were delighted, rather engrossed. Topping all, we were perhaps proud of winning Zinni—Ice Sahib's daughter as our friend. We were highly gratified because of it.

Yet, we did not know till date the real identity of this Zinni. Grapevine sources averred numerous things in a sundry way, which reached our ears. Though we made out its implications superficially, we never racked our brains to delve deep into the nitty-gritty of it. Whatever might be the mystery of her birth, Zinni was the world to Ice Sahib and vice versa. We never knew whether they had any close relations or not, we never saw anyone as such. God only knew to which caste Zinni belonged, which religion she

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followed, what her mother tongue was. Ice Sahib himself used to speak followed, with us, with a slight distorted intonations, that was it! And Zinni? in Bengali was more conversant in Bengali than in reading and writing English. Zinni was Industrial English. I told you before that Zinni used to come for offerings during the Saraswati Itold you best was no less keen than us in pandal-hopping during the Kali Puja and she was no less keen than us in pandal-hopping during the Kali Puja and Durga Puja. Again we saw Zinni putting on a slim gold-chain with Pula and 2 sining gold-chain with a Cross dangling from it. We were fine—Beeru, Teenu, Zinni and I. And, and Ice Sahib. Happiness too underwent alteration of seasons. This we felt for the

first time when Ice Sahib breathed his last. Quite abruptly, after running temperature for a day only. The graveyard was at a stone's throw from the ice-mill, just a few paddy-fields apart. Ice Sahib had been interred in a grave there. That day we saw a horde of people at Ice Sahib's residence. All of them were white-skinned Sahibs. Of course they mostly hailed from inferior castes. We, three friends, stood at the gate of the ice-mill braving the sweltering heat of Chaitra. We could not muster courage to enter within on seeing such a throng of Sahibs. We stood outside gaping vapidly, but, nothing came to our view, beyond the stupendous white wall, nothing got wafted to our ears, only a dove went on cooing that day even and the dust that was kicked up by the whirlwind of Chaitra settled on our head, face and eyes in profusion.

When it was about to be late afternoon, they left with the corpse of Ice Sahib in a hearse decked with black flowers. We saw only the carriage, the flowers, the crowd and nothing else. Where was Zinni? Zinni?! We searched for Zinni with eager, frantic eyes in each nook but to no avail.

Three of us ran straight into the gate kept wide open. That residence of Ice Sahib!! The verandah was vacant, the tub that held Zinnia flower too was equally so. Everything was vacuous, still, eerily silent. Beeru in a fear-stricken voice called, "Zinni, Zinni." Teenu followed suit—"Zinni, Zinni." No, no stir could be felt. I grew impatient and yelled in a crescendo, Zinni...Zinni!!

Someone sobbed from beneath the verandah through the dense shadow of the creepers. We three ran there. "Yonder, see, there's our Zinni." Zinni was whimpering, all tears. Zinni lifted her swollen eyes and while looking at us started sobbing once again. Our throats too got choked with tears on seeing her weep so bitterly. It seemed, as it were, we checked our tears forcibly but at last we failed and succumbed to it, sitting beside Zinni We gave vent to our tears.

We had no idea for how long we wept. When dark of the evening intensified and the stars were up in the sky, we got on to our feet holding Zinni's hands.

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Beeru offered to come and lie there at night. Teenu suggested the same. I gave a nod too.

I gave a not too.

Zinni desisted us from coming as she had an attendant at her beck and call. We three friends came back.

Next day, we took Zinni with us to the graveyard, to have a look at Ice Sahib's grave. Underneath a china-rose tree lay Ice Sahib in his coffin. A new grave. Too cold it seemed. We – Beeru, Teenu, Zinni and I – wept A new grave. Too cold it wept profusely, sitting around the grave. Perhaps, we all took a vow in mind, while returning, we would never allow Zinni to be affected by the absence of Ice Sahib. No-no-by no means.

A few days, sped by as we used to go to see Zinni everyday. One day, we learnt that Zinni had to go leaving Ice Sahib's residence. What for, where, what was the matter? Zinni knew next to nothing. At the behest of the owner of the ice-mill. And the Sahib would come to that house, Zinni's face looked dry, withered. She was in panic, "What'll happen Beeru, Teenu, Panchu-where shall I go?"

Really, we were badly worried. Where would Zinni go? With whom would she stay? What would she have to eat? We boosted her courage up and said, "Nothing to fear of. We are with you."

Thereafter, we three friends sat in the open to consult for hours with our palms pressed to our cheeks, to think heaven and hell! We missed out on sleep at night. Beeru said that his father was above board, but mother...? Mother would not allow to keep a Christian girl at our residence. On listening to Beeru, Teenu said that his mother was really generous, but Grandma? That old hag was an out-and-out pestering maniac! She would not let Zinni to cross the threshold. I commented, "Zinni makes her offerings during Saraswati Puja, she bows down to Maa Kali, she's hardly a Christian." Teenu refuted, "Whatever it is, she's a Christian. Lord Jesus dangles from her neck."

How could even I fetch a Jesus-sporting girl to my house? I too had parents. Hence, I too failed to do what Beeru and Teenu could not do. Again such inability became a cause of great pain to us then. We moved heaven and earth in our thoughts while parleying at the mango-grove in the shades of trees, we gave vent to our anger with our elders, we poured venom on Jesus as if it were the Cross that proved to be the stumbling-block, the greatest impediment!! And we consoled each other pointing to our haplessness!

Surprisingly enough, we had a mind to feel ashamed even, at that age. It was the shame of being unable to do anything for Zinni. It could be labelled as be labelled as 'a great shame'. We had to stop dropping in at Zinni's. How long could we desist her by telling lies at random? Moreover, as we

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failed to speak the truth, we felt much pain to blurt out the fib to Zinni

Our paradise of adolescence got doomed to darkness without Zinni. Mentally we turned upset, temperamentally even we all became out of sorts Mentally we all became out of sorts to some extent. It was Saturday. Returning from school we got busy in to some extensions up, while Teenu entered bounding. He kept panting as he said, "Zinni...Zinni is calling—come soon."

Zinni!! Where was Zinni?! Sprucing the strings we had totally forgotten. We ran to see Zinni. At the end of the terminal field of the neighbourhood we found Zinni in the house of the lame doctor. She kept standing beneath a jujube tree awaiting us. On seeing us Zinni cried in earnest. She went on expatiating her grief in a plaintive tone.

The old attendant who used to look after Zinni at Ice Sahib's house brought her here for shelter at last. We grew curious to know, In which room do you stay?' Zinni rejoined that she had no separate room of her own. She used to share a cubicle with that old ayah.

Zinni narrated at length-all related to this house. All pointed to the tribulations she had to face here in this house. We gave a patient hearing to all she said with our lips shut firm. We had nothing to say.

While returning, Beeru said, "Never be sad Zinni. Now you have come to stay in our locality. It's fine, we'll live near the same neighbourhood. We'll drop in everyday."

It took a few days to find that Beeru's promise was nothing but hollow. Initially we were delighted to get Zinni in our locality. We were extremely relieved to know that Zinni had found a shelter at last. But in course of time, things popped up to our view, which we never thought of or had seen before.

The house in which Zinni had put up, was actually a bread-biscuitcake factory owned by an old Parsee man. The Parsee was popularly known as Pesranjee—we used to call him 'Pestabadamjee'. One portion of the house was inhabited by the family of that Pestabadamjee in a posh Eutopean style, in an enclosed space. The rest of the house was for the bread factory, filthy as well as stinking. In that very place, breads, cakes and biscuits Were baked and the artisans stayed scattered here and there laying their heads in along with all the stewards, the bawarchi's and other riff-raffs. They used to puff at bidis, speak slang, had fun at the expense of Zinni, even ours, when we went to pay a visit to her.

The more we saw the happenings there the more startled we became. Pteviously, we saw that Zinni had no work to do. She used to perch at some solitary nook of the house and read books all alone or toy with tamarind-seeds. Sometimes, owing to lack of space in the house, Zinni used

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to spend hours sitting beneath the jujube tree, utterly alone. She used to come to spend hours sitting beautiful these came to a stop. We found Zinni working to see us even. Gradually all these came to a stop. We found Zinni working Sometimes we found Zinni hauling with much effort a couple of stupen. dous buckets by both her hands, sometimes she toted the bread-basket on her head, sometimes again she went braving the scorching heat of the afternoon to Pestabadamjee's shop, near the post-office that was located

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We saw Zinni getting emaciated in front of our eyes, day by day. The smile that dangled from her lips vanished, the red glow on her cheeks faded out. Such beautiful tuft of hair grew dry, rough and reddish, lying exposed to the air laden with wheat-flour grains. Zinni wore a tattered frock and put on a pair of coloured sandals like the Muslim girls.

One day I asked Zinni, "Why do you strain so much?"

Zinni in a depressed tone replied, "They don't let me have anything to eat unless I work, they even beat me."

Beeru sprang up as he listened to Zinni, "Tell me who dares thrash you? Tell me the name. I'll break his hands."

Zinni answered, "Who shall I name separately? All of them. If I can't work, what else will they do than striking me hard?"

We went to that aged attendant. The old lady wept bitterly and said, "Dear boys, it's my fate. I'm feeble in vision. It is totally lost in one eye. I run errands in that old Parsee's house. He pays me only Rs. 7 per month. Miss Zinni puts her labour in that factory for Rs. 5 only. Without work, she'll go starving. Yet, I keep one eye on Miss Zinni. Otherwise, they could have torn her to pieces and had had feast on her flesh. Now, Miss Zinni has come of age."

Really, Zinni had attained years, we too had. Now, we could understand many things, we could observe a lot. While Zinni used to come and stand before us donned in a soiled, coloured saree, exhibiting a waist-long single plait made of dry, rough hair, we used to shoot sidelong glances at her grown-up body and shudder within thinking of her future.

Whenever we poured into the factory to see Zinni—Idris, Nullo all cracked uncouth jokes at our cost. They even giggled nastily. Our self-respect stood hurt. Beeru remarked, "Let Zinni stay here, we won't come anymore." Teenu nodded in assent. I too dittoed his gesture.

Our bond of friendship with Zinni grew more tenuous. We could feel very well that Zinni who was the Queen of our dreams, who enjoyed a much elevated seat in our minds got deteriorated to the nadir by staying together with the rags and bobtails, eating together, lighting up the oven and kneading the dough of wheat with them. Open intimacy with Zinni could not be maintained anymore. It looked odd.

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In course of time our daily meetings, dropping in at her place regularly—all came to a close. If we met her on the road, at all, or if Zinni regularly regularly for a story-book, we talked only then. That too, only a few words stood exchanged among us.

We used to avoid Zinni overtly but covertly we kept our ears pricked up if anything fell on our ears regarding her. Yes, at that time calumny about Zinni was rife in the air incessantly issuing from different mouths.

One day Teenu came up to say, "This is, of course, the flaw of the

community."

"Of what?" I asked with wide-eyed amazement.

"Of the community. Don't you understand, nincompoop? A hybrid having no certainty of birth, what can happen to that lass? Whatever it is, she has gone to the depths, into her place of choice."

"Who are you talking about? Zinni?!" Beeru said slipping the red piece

in his pocket and pushing the board away.

"Oh yes, who else but Zinni? I can wager, say, by God-oh no, she is no descendant of any European Sahib, she belongs to a race of petty curs: she stuck peacock's feathers in her tail. Now, all these have dropped off."

We came to know the reason of Teenu's ire. Yesterday in the late afternoon, Zinni was seen with Idris somewhere near some paddy-field as per Bijon's report.

Letting them know this fact, Teenu indulged in pouring abusive comments. I was disgusted to say, "How's it Teenu that you say whatever

"What offensive has he said?" Beeru raised his voice in support of Teenu.

"Does Zinni, good or bad or whatever, mean anything either to you or to me?" I chipped in.

"Why not?" Beeru fumed in anger it seemed. "Does Zinni belong to Idris?"

"Then is she yours?" the remark spun off my mouth.

":Of course, which demon's, if not ours?" I fell silent, rather we all did. Did Zinni belong to us?I kept pondering over. Was I cogitating only? No, no, perhaps all of us, Beeru, Teenu and I kept thinking all day was Zinni ours?

Years and months sped by before our eyes. Then we sat jobless after Passing the matriculation examination. All three of us were trying hard to land a job in the Railways. Off and on, we went to Asansol for an interview. That was all, the job always eluded us.

It is anybody's guess what an unemployed youth does. Having meals

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at Hotel D' Papa, sleeping, indulging in tete-a-tete and smoking bidis. We at Hotel D' Papa, siceping, we too followed that tradition only. The only difference was that we performed too followed that traction only three additional duties. Procuring trash novels from the Rail Institute and three additional duties the midnight oil, running to the players. finishing them burning the midnight oil, running to the playground if any match was ever slated and you all understand, as the age was delicate and we had eternity in our hands, we used to regale ourselves by talking about the girls within or beyond our locality. Donning the cloth in folds, pricking the girls within of boyont the bicycle with left hand, whistling the flute we kept spending our days smoothly, while Zinni put an end to all our happiness abruptly.

Parsee Pesranji's bakery was shut down. Zinni took the job of a gatekeeper at Love's Gate, at the movie-house of Dhanbad Rail Institute. Zinni used to go to work in front of our eyes putting on a blue saree, swinging her plaits and kicking clouds of dust with her sandal. Till then, she used to stay in our locality itself, in a rented room.

Let us drive down to the main point, dumping aside the extraneous ones. All on a sudden we discovered Zinni with new eyes, at this age.

We went to see a picture—Beeru, Teenu and I. We failed to procure tickets. A milling crowd poured in to see a God-only-knew-what Bengali film. Booking tickets for a night-show, we were chatting, huddling together at a tea-stall, relishing each sip of the brew, looking hither and thither and smoking cigarettes. Just then, the braggart cinema-operator Sukhendu, a fresh import from Calcutta, was seen tittering into the stall with his hands stuck into the pocket and Zinni beside him. On seeing us, Zinni gibbered something smilingly, and then they two went to sit in a curtain-covered space.

Beeru threw a glance at me and I at Teenu. We all looked at each other and then fixed our gaze together on the curtain. We watched everything. Chops, cakes, tea in tea-pot were being served through the curtain. Sukhendu's laughter coupled with Zinni's, got wafted to our ears. Even the air got laden with the smell of cigarettes.

We hardly could make out head or tail of the picture we saw that day. After the show, all three of us glum in the dark. Approaching the neighbourhood Beeru said, "Zinni is having a whale of time then!" Teenu chipped in, "While she was with the Bakers' she got emaciated. Her sickly appearance was like that of a TB patient. Now, see, she is back to health."

I observed, "Sukhendu has fallen for her". On hearing me, Beeru flared up, and announced, "Yes, I am seeing to it. The Calcutta attitude won't be put up with, at Dhanbad."

I won't tell a fib. From that very day, some perversion had seized us. That plight can hardly be explained. In a word we became victims of sheer rancorous sheer rancorous envy that kept consuming us. Why such jealousy? Of who?

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Why did we feel concerned about it that meticulously? No, we did not go Why did we will not go with such nitty-gritty. We only took it as our discomfiture. Completely a seferir Sukhendu from Colourted into such affair. Sukhendu from Calcutta has won over us. We kept our vigil in our locality, around the movie-house. We kept

an eye on Zinni's movements, her comings and goings. At what time she an eye on a what hours she comes back, what she does, so on, so forth. One day, Teenu came up to say, "Sukhendu and Zinni are sitting in

the operator's room, huddling together." Beeru commented, "Sukhendu has bought Zinni that embroidered saree with floral designs." I remarked, "Zinni returns late at night nowadays."

Unbearable—intolerable! Simply intolerable to us! I was reminded of Beeru's words—of course, Zinni is ours! Whose then, if not ours?! Such a Zinni has become impudent and we were to stand as mere onlookers!!

Beeru threatened Sukhendu with an anonymous letter. It bore no fruit. In our hobnobbing sessions, all three of us narrated three different lurid scenes we were supposed to have witnessed. To be frank, I had not seen any such spectacle. But I would be the odd man out, if Beeru and Teenu witnessed and I did not. I fabricated a lie that yesterday, at the dead of night Sukhendu and Zinni returned home. Sukhendu put up at Zinni's room. All through the night.

On hearing it, Beeru dragged me along straight to Zinni.

"What's the matter?" Zinni inquired. "This is a gentlefolks' locality, Zinni."

"Oh God, who doesn't know it?" Zinni let out a laughter.

Beeru strained himself to say, "Why does it so happen then, do you know?"

"What?" Zinni demanded to know.

Beeru pressed me to answer that 'what'. What would I say?!I asked Teenu to explain. Teenu passed the buck to Beeru.

Lastly, nothing had been said. We three came back like fools. Zinni kept giggling.

Zinni's laughter seemed to add insult to our injury. The three of us kept on being consumed with envy. Such a humiliation could hardly be put up with!!

Suddenly in the meanwhile, we got Sukhendu in the open, on our way back after playing hockey. Beeru attacked him, we too followed suit.

The drubbing with hockey-sticks was really serious. Sukhendu was laid up for quite a few days.

Then again it went on as usual.

Sukhendu and Zinni. Only one change we noted. Zinni hardly took notice of us. If we met on the way she used to slink away with a lowered

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head. This too was intolerable. Beeru said, "You've beaten her lover black head. This too was into tage look at you? She's flown into rage deep

Teenu said, "Such an insult for that!!"

We, three friends, colluded in various ways and applied the most gruesome of all the assualts, this time! Who can tell why men grow so keen

We wrote a letter to Manik Adhikari, the Secretary of the movie-hall. Forging the names and signatures of quite a few gentlemen who were of our fathers' age and who resided in the rail-ghetto. We mentioned even their Block-Numbers in the letter. It contained a slew of obscene, hair-raising hints at Zinni's character. If such a girl was allowed to continue in her job, no gentle-maid or lady could be sent to the cinema-hall. It threatened to cause havoc in a public meeting if Zinni still held her job there!

A Secretary of a Rail Institute of a mofussil town—why would he go into such trammels?! ZINNI WAS FIRED!! Even Sukhendu was chucked out within a few days.

We were besides ourselves with joy! It were, as if, we had won the war! Being extremely glad, we went to see Zinni to sympathize with her at her place, just like wolves in sheep's skin! That day, Zinni looked at us with eyes full of wonder for quite sometime, without uttering a word.

This story could have come to an end here if Zinni left Dhanbad along with Sukhendu. We thought in that vein. But Zinni proved our assumption false. Sukhendu left Dhanbad for good and Zinni, leaving our neighbourhood, went to build a nest in a narrow, sleazy lane in the market where tiled huts stood in an array. ALONE!!

People threw a horde of varying comments on the lane where Zinni went to put up. The vegetable-vendors, potato-sellers of the market, the porters-labourers-domestic helps and even the people who sought shelters at cheap rent, used to line up there to stay.

That route was the shortest route to the Rail Institute. We used to frequent the path on our bicycles. Even our going up and down the way got a fillip after Zinni's shifting.

One day, we witnessed a scene. It was drizzling. We, Beeru and I, were returning home, being drenched, after playing a bridge tournament at the Institute through the dark lane where Zinni lived. All on a sudden, heavy downpour set in. We ran to seek shelter beneath a tin-shed, which actually was a stable for horse-drawn carts.

Suddenly Beeru cried out, "Hey, come on, see, see." I followed Beeru's directions to fix my glance. A man was hanging the dim like Mr. about the dim-lit Municipality lamp-post. With wobbling legs. Walking to

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and fro, a feet or two, he at last thumped on the threshold of a hut. "Ísn't that Nanda?"

"Ýes, he seems to be Nanda," I said.

While looking, Beeru in a stern voice said, "Even Nanda drops in at Zinni's place."

"Zinni?" I inquired, being amazed.

"How come you know?"

"I know, that hut belongs to Zinni."

The shower abated. We too took to the street.

Next day, Zinni popped up in our discussion. It was natural to come up. On hearing everything, Teenu made a sarcastic comment, "Only this much!! I knew it long back! What all I've seen or heard?! Zinni has turned no less than a harlot now! All drunkards vegetable-vendors and bidi-sellers keep visiting her place."

Beeru flared up on hearing Teenu say so.

"Let them all go, wait..."

"What will you do?" I asked.

"Î'll rough them up and draw a curtain on their trades in the market. Is she a 'property' that comes for free? Whoever comes has to be entertained!!" Is that so?"

Turning crimson in excitement, Beeru threw the butt of the bidi on Teenu only! Teenu, in brisk steps, dodged to save his shirt and kept puffing at the bidi-stub with narrowed eyes.

"The potato-seller Nanda, at last!! Fie on her! Shame!" Beeru lifted his hand to his forehead.

"What a deterioration!" with slit-eyes Teenu added, "Ice-Sahib's daughter belongs to Nanda, the potato-seller!!"

Interrupting Teenu in the middle of the sentence, I said, "Well Beeru, why are we getting so concerned? Let the owner decide what he wishes to do with his lamb."

Beeru glared at me. Being impatient, he yelped the next moment, "Does the lamb belong to Nanda?"

"Not even ours," I chipped in.

"Of course ours. Whose then if not ours?! Ask Teenu, this is a query of moral responsibility. Whatever it may be, Zinni is our childhood-pal lce Sahib's daughter. We stayed together in the same neighbourhood. That girl turning into a bazaar-girl—it's next to impossible! We can't allow that."

"Beeru is right," Teenu blabbed looking at me, "just think Panchu, this Zinni of today and that of our childhood. This is nothing but heaven and hell of ours. Ice Sahib is surely cursing us from Heaven, witnessing all these incidents."

"Listen", Beeru flicked up his forefinger at me, threateningly. It

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation of Door, it hardly matters. But you must be our friend. Be you rich or poor, it hardly matters. But you must be above our friend. Be you hen of property won't be tolerated. We have to warn Zinni

Listening to Beeru and Teenu I had no misgivings that our moral responsibility was to keep Zinni in the right path.

A few days following this, Beeru, Teenu and I kept loitering in that lane beside the market together. We used to do the shopping for our homes ourselves. Our guardians were compassionate enough to allow us to make some money thus, during our jobless days. All along, we used to buy potato from the potato-seller Nanda only. Its chief reason being Nanda allowed us to buy on credit. And the second reason was, he hailed from a gentle family. He was our childhood-pal as he studied till the final grade in UP School with us. As the childhood would not last eternally, our friendship with Nanda terminated in Class V itself. Later on, Nanda from his end was eager to revive the friendship, but we gave him the cold shoulder. Of late, as we got the advantage of buying on credit, we talked to him cordially, However, while shopping in the market, we used to jibe at Nanda suggestively and strive hard to assess his mental inclinations. Hare-brained, rolypoly Nanda only grinned protruding his teeth. Neither did he understand anything nor did he talk.

Beeru used to comment, "He is a rogue of the first order."

Teenu used to join by saying, "If not so, then how can he make money by selling potatoes?"

I opined, "He's not a blockhead at all, believe me, rather he's a sly one."

In the meantime, an opportunity came our way. Quite unexpectedly! It was nearly ten o'clock at night. It was a rainy day! Suddenly, there had been a downpour. It stopped for a while and then again the monotonous drizzling resumed. It was already late into the night when Beeru, Teenu, and I were all on the way home from the Institute together through the lane in the market vicinity. The lane stood desolate. The Municipality-lamp was dimly lit. As the lane got traversed almost, we suddenly bumped into Nanda. He was about to stumble on us while staggering out of a clandestine nook in the dark.

We moved a little apart. Still Nanda kept tottering on his feet while moving thus. Then with folded palms, he strove hard to mumble something in such an inclusion. in such an inebriated state. Perhaps, he kept apologizing for thrusting himself on our way.

Beeru glanced at Teenu, Teenu at me. Teenu made an obnoxious remark regarding Nanda. We all looked into each other's eyes, relishing the

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bnoxious shing the remark. We knew not what we had in our eyes. All on a sudden, Beeru remark. We steps forward and yanked a blow on Nanda's face straightway. flung a liver an abrupt punch, the sodden Nanda was about to fall on the Struck with an abrupt punch, the sodden Nanda was about to fall on the Struck with a thud. I saw Teenu running amuck to kick ruthlessly on his belly. Nanda made a queer shriek and fell on the road with his face sunk into the macadam.

"Well treated! Drunken villain!" Teenu muttered gnashing his teeth.

"Come, let's be off."

"Let's push off," Beeru turned his back rubbing the hands on his shirt. "Beeru," I called.

Beeru and Teenu turned their back.

Lowering my voice I said, "Well, we are fleeing. But observe, how Nanda is groaning. If the bloke kicks the bucket, then?"

"Let him die, come along," Teenu rejoined.

Agitated, staring at Nanda's body, lying on the ground Beeru sat down by his side. A little later, he stood to say in a bass tone, "Panchu, the punch had been quite hard. He is bleeding still through nose and mouth. Oh God, really! If he lies here during the whole night, even if he doesn't die, he's sure to contract pneumonia."

Beeru's words took us by fear. I said, "What will we do? Shall we abscond leaving him alone?"

Biting his lips, Beeru was engrossed in thoughts. Suddenly, he spoke up, "All right. Hold him tight, lift him up, clutching his arms and legs."

We looked at him. And asked, "Okay, we lift him folding his arms and legs-then what next?"

Guessing our attitude, Beeru exhorted, "Don't get nervous. The grandest idea has struck me. Let us put Nanda in Zinni's custody. Let his mistress take up his charge. Let Zinni too know that she cannot make love hoodwinking us."

We yielded to Beeru's proposal. Beeru was judicious to say so. We went on hauling the drenched body of such a strapping fellow as Nanda somehow. A putrid odour came wafting from Nanda's body. That rogue was still muttering something.

After rapping for long, an answer came from inside, "Who is there?" Beeru replied, "We are Beeru, Teenu, Panchu. We are in peril. Open the door soon."

Zinni unbolted the door, holding a lantern in her hand. Without any introduction, we kept down Nanda's unconscious body on the porch.

Raising the lantern to our face, Zinni screamed in panic, "Oh Gosh, why have you brought him in here?"

Wiping Nanda's face with the end of his cloth, Beeru said, "Being

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drunk, he could not walk on the road. He fell flat on his face in the drain. Don't be afraid, his bleeding has stanched—he'll be all right."

"Then, then why have you brought him in here?" Zinni asked again in a surprised, fear-struck, anxious tone.

"Then where should we take him along?" Beeru's voice had a touch of poignant sarcasm. "Nanda is our childhood friend and you too ate so, Can we ever bear the sight of Nanda lying on the thoroughfare with his Can we ever bear the organic with his face buried in the drain all night? Hence, we have brought him here, Come Panchu, Teenu."

In response to Beeru's call, we leaped out of Zinni's entrance to get on to the street. The door, however, stood wide open. As we stepped on the highway crossing the lane, Teenu exclaimed, "Ah! Whatever has taken place this time is simply great, all bruises of humiliation have healed up."

Beeru replied in a sombre tone, "A noble revenge!"

It was about a few days after the incident. We were playing cards sitting at Beeru's residence. It was afternoon. We saw Nanda quite suddenly, Nanda could not be seen for quite sometime at his potato-outlet,

On entering the room, Nanda sat down beside us and held hands of all three of us in turn in his grip. We all were taken aback. Even Nanda was absolutely undecided upon what to say. He started fawning and groaning as a cub sporting his betel-stained teeth, giggling, entreating, being overjoyed.

"What's the matter?" Beeru demanded seriously.

Nanda whined and pressed Beeru's hands once again.

"Brother, today I have come to you, you have to respect a request of mine, please."

We took alarm. Certainly Nanda had come to ask for his dues. We three eyed each other.

"What?" Teenu inquired.

Nanda with a strange expression on his face, eyes, and his voice dipped in delight as though someone kept tickling him to laughter said, "Today is my wedding, you have to attend it. Without you it will not take place by any means. You are my friends, by your grace only I have achieved it."

Nanda's wedding!!! We went mute, dazed!

"Where's the wedding taking place?" Beeru asked.

"Here only. Where else? In the market-lane. Brother, you must come without fail. I implore you." Melting in delight, pausing a while, Nanda gripped disclaim in the market-lane. Brother, you must be without fail. I implore you." Melting in delight, pausing a while, Nanda grinned displaying his teeth and spoke out, "My would-be wife too. She has sent me asking for you again and again. Besides, you only know her, you have bequeathed her to me. You yourselves will stand witness to our marriage."

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"We to act as witnesses?" Beeru sprang up. "What art you saying, Nanda? Keep your nonsensical babble aside. Come clean, rejoin straight. Who are you marrying? What witnesses are you talking about?"

"hew!!" Nanda said in a low, shy, womanish tone, "As if you know nothing! Oh my brother, it's Zinnia. I'm going to win your Zinnia's hands in marriage. It will be a registered marriage, I mean to say, who else but you can act as our witnesses?"

Nanda got on to his feet. In an instant, he wrapped the end of his cloth round his neck and joined his palms once again. He said, "I bow down to you with the cloth round my neck. Do come surely. Otherwise, I shall be aggrieved. Come early a bit in the evening. A pile of duties lie waiting for me. Let me take your leave, brother."

He gushed in as storm, he left like a squall even. We – Beeru, Teenu and I – threw asunder by the thrust of the squally gale stood like uprooted trees, it seemed.

Much later, Beeru asked, "What do you make out, guys?"

"We are made asses, what else to make out?" Teenu sighed in reply. "Will you attend?" I wanted to know.

Beeru walked up and down the room for sometime and the smoke of his bidis made our minds more foggy. At last, he thundered, "Certainly, we will. That too, much earlier. We'll make Zinni understand—there's still time at her disposal. Marrying Nanda and committing suicide—these are just the two sides of the same coin."

"What's the gain in making her see our point?" I inquired in a subdued tone.

"What profit? It's our moral responsibility. Duty rather. Zinni is Ice Sahib's daughter and how can she enter into a wedlock with Nanda who is no match for her? Why? Is there any dearth of groom who she can marry?" Beeru got extremely excited.

"But..." Teenu hummed and hawed. "If Zinni refuses to listen to

"What will she do on a turning deaf ear to us? Witness?! Who'll stand witness to her wedlock? Three of us indeed. Then dear, where to escape?!" Beeru winked and danced his eyebrows, "Be ready for a grand show this evening, Panchu. I can visualize before my eyes—Nanda is grovelling at our feet and holding our hands seeking pity and Zinni is weeping bitterly..." Beeru twitched his mouth and fell laughing taking after the arrant knaves of movies and theatres.

Shouldering the noble onus of moral responsibility and looking avidly forward to have fun we three spruced ourselves up as dandies in the early and stepped out.

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Beeru made his voice clear and called, "Nanda!"

Immediately, Zinni emerged out of the room to answer the call Approaching the entrance she grew anxious, "Hey, have you come? Why do you keep standing? Come—let's go into the room." We left our shoes on the verandah and went to sit in the room. Nanda had arranged for us to sit on the divan by spreading a mat and an embroidered coverlet. Wood. apple flowers remained pled on the glass-plate. Just by the side of it stood a betel-leaf box and a pack of cigarettes. At one nook of the room the petromax lamp stood on a stool illuminating the surroundings with a bluish glow. We stole a glance to have a full view of the room. The room lacked in embellishments. Only a few essential things were kept. A lone picture adorned the wall. Perhaps it was of Ice Sahib.

On entering the room, Zinni said, "Let me prepare tea for you. Have some, okay? It's only evening."

"Where is Nanda?" Beeru inquired.

"He's gone to Heerapur. He will come back soon." Zinni smiled queerly.

Our conversation broke abruptly. All fell silent. We all began to feel uneasy. Probably, sensing the situation, Zinni said, "Please be seated. I'll bring you tea." As Zinni left, I whispered, "Zinni is looking chic, isn't she?" Teenu joined forth, "Superb!" Only Beeru maintained a studied silence.

Really, Zinni was looking exceedingly beautiful. It was nothing new that she would look ravishing in the dazzling glare of the petromax light, donned in a bright red saree and a red blouse. Zinni had even done her hair into a knot today and stuck a couple of wood apple buds into that This was the first time we saw Zinni tying her hair into a knot in lieu of plaits.

In a mesmerized voice I remarked, "Nanda is fortunate."

The words reached Beeru. Beeru shot an incensed stare at me and in a lowered tone gibbered, "Let's see the luck"...and after a pause resumed, "I'll raise the "I'll raise the topic as Zinni enters with tea and you'll aid me. Beware!! No idle talk from none of us. We'll put a grave face."

Zinni helped us to have the tea-saucers, one by one and went to stand

apart.

Teenu and I took a sip and kept waiting: now Beeru would begin. But Beeru did not. We had our tea. We kept looking at Beeru at askance. Had Beeru turned nervous at last?!

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ould begin. at askance. As Zinni was about to leave after standing for a long while, Beeru blabbed forth all on a sudden, "Why do keep standing? Come, sit down. Sit here itself."

Beeru budged a little. We too made room for her by shifting a bit. Zinni sat down. Beeru lit up a cigarette. He threw his glance at the rafters. Looked at me, at Zinni. Then in a silk-soft tone, slowly he said, "Have you done the right thing?"

"Are you asking me?" Zinni lifted her timid eyes to ask. Beeru nodded. "About what?" Zinni questioned.

"Of what else....This, I mean this matter...." words seemed to fail Beeru. Teenu came to Beeru's rescue.

"Beeru is talking about your marriage."

Zinni smiled looking at Beeru's face.

"What about this marriage?"

"It's not perfect," I opined. "Nanda is no match for you, I mean, he doesn't go well with you,"....

"Why?" Zinni kept simpering, pursing her lips still.

"There's no why. He doesn't go in sync, I mean, he is no match for you, as simple as that. Or whatever it is. Nanda is a third-grade bloke, a potato-seller. What's his social status? He has no place in the gentleman's society. Has he?" Beeru looked agitated, we noted.

Zinni gave a patient hearing to everything. She got up from the divan. She glued her stare on all of us, one after another. No smile toyed at the corner of her lips, there was a strange stiffness instead. Quite haltingly, in distinct pronunciation, Zinni rejoined, "The aristocratic society has no room for me."

"Who told you?" Beeru registered his indignation, "You are our friend—Ice Sahib's daughter. Indeed, you have a stand in the society of the gentlefolk."

"Oh really!! Then you are uncivil—why did you leave a drunk potatodealer of the market in my room at the dead of night?" Zinni's voice trembled

We were doomed to silence. Words kept failing us, we were bewildered. Beeru tried hard to exonerate ourselves. "What wrong have we done? We heard that Nanda, that Nanda used to visit your place quite often."

"You also used to come. For that you..." Zinni's crooked smile as a sharp scimitar brought out our deeply covert, stealthily nurtured desire to the open, in a iiffy.

Three of us looked at each other and hung our eyes.

"You're crossing limits, Zinni," Beeru said while getting up, "I can't tell about others but I never did enter your room, I used to stay outside

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the door always. I used to come to watch how you kept going on with

"For no reason whatsoever?" Zinni this time laughed aloud,

"I can't tell you whether for any reason or whatever. To look after you, I mean, to see that you never go astray is my duty, I rather take it as my moral responsibility..."

Interrupting Beeru in the middle Teenu sprang up to say, "Me too, I never used to enter your room. Never think so mean of me."

It was my turn now. While getting on to my feet, I said, "Never think all to be equal. I am not bad."

"I know, Nanda is also not like you. You came several times, but never found the door open. But Nanda came only once and..."

By that time, we three came to stand on the threshold. Just then, Nanda was entering through the entrance, howling. He was accompanied by a couple of gentlemen. Between the two, one was a lawyer. I knew him. He happened to be the resident of this locality itself.

"Oh brothers! You've come!! My joy knows no bounds! How long had you been here? Why are you standing here outside? Come, please come, come inside"... Nanda shoved us in by both his hands.

The whole affair had come to such a pass that we stood in the middle of the room speechless, perplexed and perspiring terribly.

We heard Nanda saying, "Please be seated, Sir, please! Ukilbabu, take your seat please. You too sit down, please. Sir, they are my friends and hers too. They'll stand witness to our marriage."

"Everything is ready. So, why get late in the beginning of an auspicious function?" Ukilbabu asserted.

Everything again began to grow luminous, distinct in front of my eyes—the bluish glow of the Petromax, Zinni's countenance, the bedspread with floral embroidery, the plate containing wood-apple flowers. The Sira hakim of a Dhanbad Court, or a Sub divisional Officer or whatever also was with them. Papers were fished out, one or two queries were asked by the Sir."

"Come on, please sign," the lawyer proffered his pen to us. We three kept looking at each other. My heart thumped then. Now the catastrophe would be let loose. In an instant, all the lights of the room would snuff out. Nanda would come running to fall on our feet. Zinni would start sobbing bitterly.

We kept waiting for the finale, with bated breath fixing our stare on

Once more Beeru threw a glance at us. Looked at Zinni. Then in a Beeru. flash, he leaped out of the room and went racing across the road.

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At first, we were taken by surprise. Even Nanda, the lawyer and the Sir!! The very next moment, feeling the pulse of the situation, Teenu and I too followed suit.

While Nanda raised a hue and cry, we had rushed down to the road. Beeru was much ahead of us, and, Teenu and I kept running almost parallelly.

Traversing the lane, we got on to the highway, running quite a length of that way we came to a halt in the dark, along the boundary of the Shiva Temple. All of us were dumbfounded. None of us said anything, rather could not say anything. We panted and wiped our sweat beads.

Standing there awhile, being calm, a strange uneasiness started to cocoon us. Perhaps we all were imagining the bridal ceremony of Zinni in mind.

Cutting the ice, Beeru said, "Teenu and you can leave, I'll go to the Station. An urgent letter has to be dropped into the R.M.S of Bombay

No sooner he finished speaking, than he left by the market-lane briskly. Teenu was cogitating something as he watched. Beeru leaving. He said, "Surely it's not 9 p.m. yet, isn't it Panchu? Let's drop in at Jatinbabu's residence for once, what is he doing with the job-application?!" Completing the sentence, Teenu did not wait a moment to take to the left of the Shiva Temple.

I was all alone. I sighed looking the way Beeru and Teenu left. I tiptoed to the front. Where should I go? Where? In the front lay Mac Sahib's bungalow's field. I scaled the fence to sit in the meadows.

It was getting dark. Wet breeze gushed in. The chill of damp grass caressed hands and feet. No moon peered in the sky, not even the stars. Clouds kept piling up.

The incident of the evening still came thick in the mind. I kept looking at that room, that light, Zinni, Zinni's knot, the flower tucked at that knot. What transpired at last, who knew?! Nanda and Zinni —the groom and the bride of a wedding that ended in a fiasco, perhaps weltered in the dust, Putting out the Petromax... Nanda cried, and Zinni too did. Or...something else?!

I grew badly curious. It seemed as if everything would turn to naught, if I missed out on the finale of Zinni's wedding ceremony. What was the harm in it? None was keeping an eye on me. I would just go for once to peep in, that was all.

I sat up. I took the back lane that led to Zinni's lane.

I walked up to the lane. A blind alley. One or two souls only were seen around. One or two drops drizzled. I kept myself in hiding and inched

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towards Zinni's place. A leaf of the door stood ajar. Through the other, light still seeped out—that bluish beam. Then? Then Nanda?! As I tiptoed light still seeped out— talk towards the open leaf of the door to pop my head in, someone addressed

Getting startled, when I was about to escape, I discovered Beeru by my side.

"You?" I was crest-fallen.

"Teenu has come too. He is standing near the stable."

Teenu came to the front. We three stood in front of Zinni's door, "Come, let's go back," Beeru suggested.

"What has happened to them?" I demanded to know.

"That which was supposed to happen..."

Beeru grew serious to rejoin.

"Who gets bothered about marriage if the lawyer is present? I really take umbrage with Nanda, the rogue, he welcomed all the riff-raff to stand witnesses at last. What harm was there to wait a bit? I came only a little later."

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"Have you come since long?" I was curious to learn.

"Yes, I did. What else to do? Leaving you alone, I thought that I did wrong. After all, Nanda, Zinni both of them were our friends. We have a moral responsibility indeed. Let me sign..." Beeru's voice was solemn.

"Right you are. I too thought in that vein. At last I turned up to sign only," Teenu chipped in.

"I even thought so," I said nonchalantly, looking at Beeru, "I would have left by putting a signature, that's it."

We three began to move to return home.

Before we came to shoulder the moral responsibility, a pack of 'immoral' souls had come to do so. By now, Zinni and Nanda perhaps, kept beaming, sitting on the embroidered counterpane, beneath the bluish

Finishing the narrative, Panchuda let his lips part into a noiseless smile.

Translated from Bengali by Ketaki Datta

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Episode Hekimsaheb

Manoj Mitra

Stage Direction

Hekimsaheb's grave at the foot of a green-crowned a old palm-tree. The backdrop remains unchanged during the play: the open sky, an ancient palm, and the grave more than a century old. The extended stage space before the tree will change in appearance to suit the different scenes set in various locations. But there should be nothing like a wall or a door that might obstruct our view of the first backdrop.

Act I

Sc I

[The sun is going down. A glitter of sunlight and a mild breeze touch the top of the palm. Occasionally its stiff, long leaves break the silence by their rattle. Waving his fan of yak's hair, and singing the healing spell, a Fakir comes up to the silent grove.]

Fakir

[To the audience] May troubles be overcome. May the Almighty's limitless grace shower forth like rain upon you. Allah make you hale, may you live and prosper with your children....Dear hearts, I am a fakir, my days pass in wandering. Wherever I go, I seek out one person, in whose hand I leave a lighted lamp. [Taking a lamp from his sack] Today I will light this lamp on the grave of Hekimsaheb of Dariaganj. [Pointing to the grave] I have never seen him. That's not surprising, the man lived almost a hundred and fifty years ago. Folk have told me Hekimsaheb's tale. [Fakir rolls the wick on his knee with a piece of rag.] Dear hearts, just as we seldom see the wishwell bird nowadays, we hardly

ever find a hakim among doctors. But they were there once hakimi remedies were much in use in the households of rural Bengal. And, of course, villages and market. centres were troughs of disease. Malaria, kala-azar, inflamed spleen, asthma, tuberculosis, scabies, all flourished like pet hens and geese in every home. Epidemics would wipe clean village after village. There was no drinking water, no proper disposal of waste, you couldn't make out the roads and pathways from potholes and ditches—but no one bothered. The British rulers, their lackeys the zamindars, the zamindars' henchmen the talukdars—the many feudal go-betweens of the Permanent Settlement would only understand taxation. If people die off, let them, but taxes must be paid. Oh my dear hearts, in that time of trouble, when riotous swarms of vultures darkened the sky, in that terrible time, our Hekimsaheb would roam ward after ward of Dariaganj taluk on his lame donkey, and cry....

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[Hekim's voice can be heard from afar-calling out in the tone of a street-seller.]

Hekim's voice: Do you want cures...cures...cures...cures...fevers, coughs and chills, aching eyes, chest pains, cures for all ills I have...are you well, folks at home, are you well...are you well... [In the shadowy mingling of day and night Hekim's voice whirls into the empty sky and fades away. The day dies. A pale moon like a sliver of gourd is in the sky. The wick, has been rolled. Fakir lights the lamp.]

Fakir

Dear hearts, nowadays it seems patients must go looking for doctors, grow weary in the search. Hekimsaheb went looking for patients. Day in, day out, moving from door to door...are you well, my friends, are you well....[Pause] In memory of this wishwell man I shall go round his grave ten times with this lamp

[With the lamp in his hand Fakir begins his circuit of Hekim's grave. The first round goes well. In the second, Fakir does not return. Instead, Hekim appears from behind the mound. Wearing pyjamas slightly short, a long loose upper garment, a steep hat, the middle aged Hekim is firmly built. He has a medicine chest in his hand, a sunworn umbrella under his arm, a bulging sack on his shoulder. Hekim returns to his cottage at nightfall after his daily round.

Hekim

There, let's see you put down the pot over there, in the corner of the yard—right in the moonlight.

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Gangamani : Why in the moonlight? Is the mixture going to drink moonlight?

Hekim : So it will.

Gangamani : It will?
: Didn't you know?

Hekim : Didn't you know?

Never.

Gangamani | Gangamani places the pot in the yard where the moonlight gleams

prettily, away from the barrier of trees.

Hekim : It will drink moonbeams through the night, and the cool

breeze....

Hekim

Gangamani : [Smiling] What's that? Does your medicine have a belly then?

See here! [He picks up and throws away the earthen plate covering the pot.] Hekim's mixture drinks the fragrance of flowers, the moisture of dawn, honey and musk, the green of the forest ... it has a big appetite. When lightning flashes among the black clouds which hide the sky from end to end, it drinks up the flash. One must trap it by covering the mouth

of the pot...

Gangamani : Why Hekimsaheb?

Hekim : For strength, for beauty. Disease is an evil foe. Whoever

grapples with it must have spirit, must have lustre.

[Sitting beside the pot, Hekim studies the colour of the moon in the hot liquid.]

Look, look, Gangamani, how the moon floats. You will know whether the job has been done right from the colour of the floating moon. If a radiant gold, you will know it will work—if a cloudy brass or copper, you will know

you've failed.

(Burkha-clad Moharbai enters with nervous steps and waits nearby.]

Mohar : Hekimsaheb. [Hekim and Gangamani start, Mohar removes her veil.] I need to know something...it's urgent...so I had to disturb you at such an odd hour.

Gangamani : [In a furious voice] Oh, you haven't yet finished talking, have you, even after having the poor man beaten up?

Mohar : [After looking at Gangamani for a while in silence] I'm very thirsty

- will you give me a little water, sister?

Gangamani : I don't feel like giving you anything, do you see? No - one

likes getting beaten up, isn't that so?

Hekim : Gangamani...

Gangamani : [Harshiy] You can give it to her, if you like.

Hekim : [To Mohar] Please sit down. [Hekim goes in, Mohar paces the

yard restlessly. After observing her from the corner of her eye,

Gangamani calls to Hekim,]

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri : Where will she sit: Bring a mat as well. Gangamani Mohar

Who are you? What are you doing here in the middle of

: Drinking moonlight. Gangamani : What did you say? Mohar

: What dad job : Drinking moonlight. Drinking the chill of frosty dew. Gangamani [In a stinging voice] Sometimes I also drink flashes of light-

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Mohar Are you mad?

No. But I can cure people of madness. Gangamani

[Hekim comes out with water and a mat. Mohar raises the pitcher and drinks like a swallow, while Gangamani uses the chance for a

[To Hekim] What about a fan, won't you fan her? Gangamani

[Pausing in her draught] Ask her to go outside. I want a few Mohar

words.... [She resumes drinking.]

[Clearly embarassed] Will you go a little away... .Let me hear Hekim what she has to say...do go, why don't you....Go and stroke

Moti for a while. : Oh yes! I'll go stroke Moti, that's what I'll do. [She pulls Gangamani

Hekim by the hand to one side.] Turn her out quick, if you know what's good for you! Why has she come all this way by herself in the dead of night?" She's going to get you into big, big trouble, I'm telling you. And if you're trapped into this sort of thing, not a soul will stand by you even if you're

beaten to death, take it from me.

Mohar [Impatient, now she has finished the water] Look at me

> Hekimsaheb. Look at me....I have no time to waste. [Hekim looks around] What were you asking me the other day about an illness? Did you mean it, or were you guessing? Hekimsaheb, I lied to you....I have been running a little fever for a few days....My body seems weary, I'm losing interest in music and singing...it itches here and there... becomes red if I scratch, then white....[Pause] It's rather strange, the last two or three days I've noticed, there's no feeling under my foot! No feeling of heat! There's your

oven glowing. See, I'm putting my foot on it....Nothing will happen. [Mohar stands with her foot on the clay oven.] Nothing

at all, no feeling. [Withdraws her foot] What is this disease? Were you talking about this the other day, Hekimsaheb...?

[Hekim is lost in thought, he has not heard Mohar call him] Hekimsaheb, she is saying something [Gangamani's hatred Gangamani

is much abated

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Mohar : Today Aunt told me about a disease. First dry sores grow on the body, then the hands and feet begin to decay then

on the body, then the hands and feet begin to decay, then rot and fall off. No one will even cross my shadow, they will stone me away from wherever people live. O

Hekimsaheb, is that what is happening to me, that disease?

Hekim : That...[with suppressed excitement] It is the malady. That terrible enemy! That...[Mohar presses both hands to her head and sits down

abruptly. She sobs with her face on her knees,]

Gangamani : Shall I light a lamp? Do you want to see the spots?

Mohar : Not today, let today be, sister. Spare me tonight. There will be a whole life of that. Do you see now, sister, why I asked

you to go outside?

Hekim : Don't be afraid, Baisaheba.

Mohar : Not afraid?

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Hekim : No, Baisaheba, my eyes tell me, the sickness has not caught you in its grip as yet. We can only see its signals, we can

only hear its footsteps. With treatment you will be fully

cured Baisaheba...there is treatment for it.

Mohar : I hear it is incurable, Hekimsaheb?

Hekim: Those who say that have born to be the slaves of illness.

Every ailment has a cure, an antidote, in this world. One disease cannot be more powerful than the might of the whole world, Bai. Can it be possible that the energy of a few germs is greater than the strength of these green trees, clouds and moonlight, sweet waters and sweet breezes? [His eyes and face are shining. The birds of dawn can be heard.]

I know the remedy. I do.

Gangamani : Can you save her?

Hekim : Let's see, let's see. I have never seen it, only heard about

it....I've never handled the palliative either, only heard of it from a darvesh. How I have looked for the two, for how long! Let me start the battle between two unknown forces, let's see who wins. I need bloodroses, Bai...without the bloodrose I can't get to work, my experiment has been

stalled so long because of the roses....O Allah!

[Walking to one side Hekim looks upwards and calls in a moved voice, Allah...Allah...The moon is losing its colour. The moonlight

pales.]

Translated from Bengali by Bhaswati Chakravorty

Manoj Mitra / 165

Are Bengali Stories Falling Behind?

Jyotirmoy Das

Beginning with a population of three hundred and thirty million at the time of Independence, fifty-five years down the line the ever increasing Indian population has touched ten billion. This trend is greatly reflected in Bengali short stories. Immediately the image that flashes in front of my eyes is that of a long march. I had once seen a World War II movie—Nazi soldiers were continually marching over a snow-covered Russian field. It was almost as though they were there just to walk. At times one or two weary soldiers fell to the ground, yet the others kept on marching unheeding to the fate their fallen comrades. In the long march from three hundred and thirty million to ten billion, the modern Bengali story has been marching mechanically ahead.

Since it is marching, we can assume that it is progressing ahead as well—of course if it is unlike the mime artist's style of walking. All of you must have seen such a show where the mime's entire body language is that of an athlete. His clenched jaw, bent elbows, tensed calf muscles, all imply great speed. His profuse sweating reflects extreme physical labour. But the moment the spotlight is switched off and the stage lights come on, it becomes clear that the actor hasn't moved even an inch. The place from where he had started tunning was the place where had been stationary at all the while. And yet we, the audience had felt joyous at the thought of his swift running.

From Bankim to Rabindranath, from Kallol period to Shastrobirodhi, from Nim literature to Post-modern—Bengali short stories have not ceased running. Yet I feel as though somehow Bengali short stories have fallen behind. One of the initial pre-requisites had been that a tale should have a story line. All the stories were sourced from life's experiences, from all that was happening all around, from an exceptional moment stolen in time—those have been discarded by the modern writers as being too

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olen in ng too commonplace. The values of life have changed and so have the language, the subject, the style and the form of the short stories. All types of stories started emerging from ten billion people—some without any philosophy or aim, some zero in terms of experience and some with the same repetitive thoughts and backgrounds. All that was published in the little magazines in the name of experimentation was very tiring for the reader, to say the least. Mark Twain was the first to begin a crusade against such stereotypical stories. He had said: "People who look for a plot in a story ought to be shot dead." Since we have always been great admirers of western thought, we considered Mark Twain's words to be the Holy Truth and disposed of stories of Manik, Achintya, Banaphool, Jyotirindra, Narayan, Narendranath.

Why should these people be dismissed as not being real writers? Preachers of western ideals claim that these people were realists—they wrote whatever they saw. But realism was lamentably out of date—because apparently none of us can actually see things. They put forward some strong examples—that of railway lines merging in the distance or that of the sky coming down to meet the earth at the horizon. And so came about the birth of shastrabirodhi stories (stories defying usual norms). They said that actual realism was something completely different. Hence it is no use seeing an apple and making a sketch of it—one has to depict all its apple-like characteristics correctly, that is, the smooth, juicy, pulpy feeling was the true representation of an apple. And this is what should be emphasized in a story when writing about an apple. For this reason shastrabirodhi writers prefer to call themselves anti-realists. For example:

The room that has a balcony and from inside the room the dark balcony is visible, in the darkness its white hand can be seen, in that room was born such a person, who spent his childhood, adolescence etc in that room not looking outside-not looking at the balcony, looking at the light in the room, looking at the dampstained walls, looking at the trunk-suitcase-eldest son, looking at the chair-table-middle son, looking at the shirt-pant-dhoti-sari-middle daughter, looking at nothing in particular seeing nothing ordinary, seeing nothing else at all, then at one time sitting in class in school, sitting in class in college, just sitting looking at the teacher, just looking at the blackboard, looking at the chair-table, just looking, looking at everything, not seeing anything, unable to see anything, on becoming tired he began thinking the way he used to,

"Balcony, my balcony, one day I'll go to the bal-

cony."

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You might have noticed that the above excerpt consists of a single sentence. Four similar sentences complete the entire story. This story by the author Amal Chanda was highly acclaimed in the sixties. Many critics put forward long philosophical explanations at that time and some still continue to do so. It is desired that a reader gets some food-for-thought on reading a story. This would enable him to identify himself with the character and the situation and it would finally lead to his liking the story better. In other words it should touch the reader's heart. If the heart is left out and only the mind is kept in consideration then perhaps it reflects well on the author's intellect however the reader is left with a gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction that he might have been cheated. Personally I feel that the shastrabirodhi stories comprise mere gimmicks.

I feel that instead of subjecting a story to rigorous post mortem in order to glean it's philosophy, it would be so much better if that philosophy made itself apparent in the story itself—just as though the innocence of a child is evident from his spontaneous smile.

Let us now talk about a story written by Urdu writer Sadat Hasan Monto. The name of the story is "Toba Tek Singh". After Independence, the Indian and Pakistani government decided that along with the exchange of tangible and intangible properties on the basis of religion, the lunatics in the asylums would also be repatriated. While sending the Hindu and Sikh madmen from Lahore asylum to India it was found one Sikh called Bishen Singh was unhappy with what was happening. He claimed that he belonged to the village Toba Tek Singh. He would not leave the asylum before it was ascertained whether village Toba Tek Singh belonged to India or Pakistan. In fact he used to talk about Toba Tek Singh such a lot that people forgot his real name and began to call him Toba Tek Singh. One day when the Pakistani officials bought the Hindu and Sikh lunatics to the border, Toba Tek started protesting vehemently. He told everybody that he had come to know that the village Toba Tek Singh was in Pakistan and hence he was unwilling to leave Pakistan. He kept requesting everybody to take him back to the Lahore asylum. He stood in the no-man's land between the two countries and despite all attempts; the Pakistani officials could not make him budge. After standing there the whole day, at nightfall Bishen Singh a.k.a. Toba Tek Singh fell to the ground and breathed his last. "And bending over his dead body, rows of Indian and Pakistani madmen began looking at him."

The inner philosophy of the story is expressed clearly and beautifully. A madman has the same identity in all countries, all castes, all religions he is just a madman. The actual lunatics are the officials who had to segregate the lunatics based on religion. Seen from that angle in this story of 'lunatic

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exchange', Toba Tek Singh is the only normal person. Since madmen have exchange, his final resting place could only have been the no-man's land. The author has subtly dealt quite a blow to our inner conscience.

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The one thing that can be said of the storytellers rejected by the post modernists is that everyone has a past. And the present can only emerge out of that past. Hence Post modernism followed Modernism and maybe beyond that will come Post-Post modernism. It is a lot like those relay races where the previous athlete hands over the baton to the successor to enable him to run. So, just as it is true that the works of Rabindranath, Manik Banerjee and Narendranath can no longer satisfy modern readers, it is equally true that it is on those works, combined with those of Achintya, Banaphool, Narayan, Ashapurna that the monument of Bengali short stories rests. Many people have again blamed the reader for the paucity of good short stories. They claim that many a time the reader is unable to identify a good story meaning that good stories find no takers. Yet other modern authors have linked the evolution of story-writing to the status of the reader. According to them, there is a particular segment of readers who are satisfied only with stereotyped commonplace stories—and they are the ones for whom Bengali short stories are falling behind. They feel that the opposite of such readers are the 'thinking' readers. Since they are considerably less in number, the pace at which Bengali stories have progressed has been tremendously slow. According to these critics, Bengali literature needs to be rescued from the other type of readers.

It is difficult to accept this complaint against the reader. The story penned by an author finds it's home with one reader or a group of them. There is actually no connection between the reader's character and the quality of writing. While an author creates a story, he should not be bothered about the type of readers who'll read the story. He writes due to the urging of his own inner feelings and his experiences marinate the plot. Had the novels and stories written by Jibanananda Das been published when they had been written, probably the world of Bengali literature would have undergone a sea change. We lost that opportunity but one truth remained—readers could not influence Jibanananda's creative instincts. Some people might still claim that it was because Jibanananda was unsure about the kind of teception his stories would get, that he kept them stashed away in a box during his lifetime. Who can answer this question?

An answer is not needed. I can recall a short tale about a reader and his relationship with a story. It went something like this:

> One day the King of Hastinapur, Dhritarashtra instructed his son Duryodhana to bring him a good man. Duryodhana left the palace to carry out the order. But

Jyotirmoy Das / 169

he Digitized by Arya Samfaj Foundation Chennal And re Gangotriarashtra looked questioningly at him, Duryodhana said that he had gone through the entire kingdom and met countless people yet he could not locate a single good man. Next Yudhisthira was asked to carry out a similar task. Yudhisthira went out and returned almost immediately with a man who was still sweating profusely. Dhritarashtra questioned, "Is that your good man? "Yudhisthira replied in the affirmative. The Maharaja said, "You must have had to labour hard to find this man? "Yudhisthira said "Not at all. This man was breaking stones just outside the palace. He was the first person I saw and so I brought him here." The Maharaja asked "But how do you know that he is a good man? To this Yudhisthira replied "Maharaja, in my eyes all men in this world are good. So I did not have any trouble locating a good man". On hearing this Maharaja Dhritarashtra bestowed a warm smile upon Yudhisthira.

This is the end of the story. What this story says is that the classification between good and bad is something relative. Every story can be a good story if it is readable and it touches the heart and fires the imagination.

Post-modern authors have often written stories in the light of highbrow knowledge and erudition and such stories often do not make pleasant reading. Sometimes the style of writing makes a story readable but the matter does not touch the heart; instead, it just provides weighty information for the brain.

Speaking at a seminar on 21st century Indian literature organized by the Sahitya Akademi, famous poet Alokranjan Dasgupta had regretfully said, "Bengali poets and writers unnecessarily become blind followers—while Europe has long relegated Post-modernism to the dustbin, Bengali writers are still caught up in that storm. Post-modernism is a non-issue."

Being dismissive of authors who write so-called 'commonplace' stories about enlightenment and emotions and deliberately trying to thrust European 'non-issue' Post-modernism on Bengali literature, are we not forcing it to fall behind? Why is it that even today works by Rabindranath and Saratchandra top the bestseller's lists? Why is it that even today we feel like reading a story from a volume of Narendranath Mitra's Golpomala? And why do we like it? Can anybody answer these questions?

'Sornabharathi'*

Means of Livelihood

"Portraits of all gods—please Buy, Sir...." Hearing the familiar voice I looked back.

For a mere fifteen rupees Gods of all stature Stood smiling Inside those plastic frames.

Some stopped and stared. Some bargained Some purchased.

When none came by I enquired: "How goes the business?"

"Nothing much Sir. Earlier
When I was selling lottery-tickets
I could save a few coins.
Now...it suffices for
The daily-bread alone..."

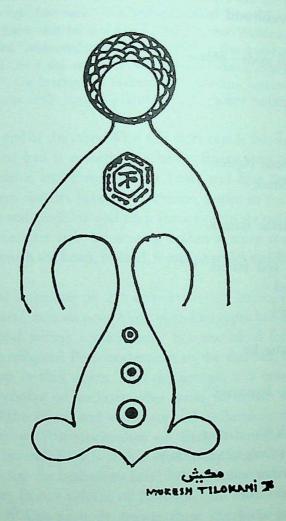
The life he lived Selling the hopes/faiths of others is

^{*} Original name Muniyaandi

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Now, in the sale of His own hopes/faiths...

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan



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Loneliness

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When there is absolutely none You do come Revealing to me The vacuum caused by my Loneliness.

As like a mobile rain-bow The wing of a butter-fly Comes down and beats

With no embarrassment It becomes possible To achieve it In a friendly manner.

Unable to go past
Before it bounces
And
Captures you
With its crafty enterprise

Through the densely creeping Vapour of snow Burning deluge Would springforth.

Despite striving with All my might To step out Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri You drag me inside Again and again.

I feel my Being alone And also that It should not be so.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan



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The Page that Came off from the Dictionary of Friendship

So as to do away with the gap
In an all too close companionship
Did I bare to you injuries, scars,
Wounds that are slowly healing,
Of course, through my utter nakedness

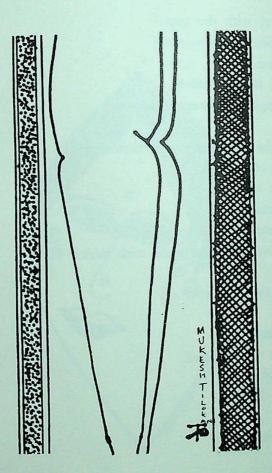
But, forgetting the philosophy of friendship Relishing, within your heart The inopportune climates of My wounding times Why did you transfer them to alien ears All the while entwining your hand with mine?

Henceforth, refusing to show my Raw-space
To anybody whatsoever
Hiding me inside a thick shell
And closing it tightly
Disintegrating in the heat
Of the heart
Will I ooze out, unseen.

Perhaps, if you are to slip and fall In the seeping mire of my death You could feel the pain.
But, to whom would you reveal your 'raw' person...?

At least, till the time you Acquire an 'ideal' friend Go past, unscathed, my dear pal, Crossing the slippery path and all.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan



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Telephonic Tongue

In bird's tongue
I sing in unison
With it.
I converse in the
Language of rock.
With a tree
With a plant
I talk in their
Respective tongues.

With the river's rustle
With the wind's swings
And swayings
In the signs of the
'dumb'
With body-languages
My feelings are...

With the animals' roars I have long been Acquainted

Before the tinkling
Of telephone subsides
I coin my 'language'
And knitting it back and front
I paint the colours.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan

Azhagiyasinger

The Street

I walk along the Dark streets The incomprehensible distance That pursues Might end. The sky that conceals Within its vast canvas Stars that emit glow-drops As valuable pearls Are visible in the dark. The houses with doors All shut And dogs that treat you With scant respect On taking long strides The sound of your footsteps Screaming Would frighten you to the core. Where the path closes Comes one more. Proving elusive to the brain The destination leads you on.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan

Dumb

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'Sathara' Maalathy

Dumb-Struck

This silence when Speech has absolutely Failed Wears peace and permanence.

As there is nothing more To converse.

The noisy news
Accumulating
Might scratch and
Tear this
Silken surface.

The inner-being
Relishes
The mix of hues and shades
Of memories
Stuck in this silence—

As the child Unwilling to have a shower Even after 'Holi' is all Over,

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan

Pooma Eswaramurthy

The Expanse of the Rain

In the early hours of night While returning home A co-traveller, seated next Showed it to me:

"What's this..?
In one half of the road
Pours down the rain
While the other half remains
All-drained...?

I observed him closely.

He was not drunk.

I looked at my own self intently.

I too was not drunk.

I looked outside. Indeed, his words were true. In one half of the road alone The rain rains.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan

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The Cat-Companion

I had a friend wandering With a cat's head. As like a kid Roaming about in his Father's clothes most Unsuitable He would entertain us With various cranky pranks. He, wandering with the Cat's glowing eyes Claimed that Ghosts would become visible to him During night. As bearing some semblance to the lion, he claimed to belong To the royal clan of the forest. He, wandering with the attire Of a cat Gained two new pals. The same shirt. The same catty countenance. The same 'loose-hanging' shirt of Father The same cranky pranks. In pairs they began wandering All over the place.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan

Pazhanivel

L-KG, U-KG

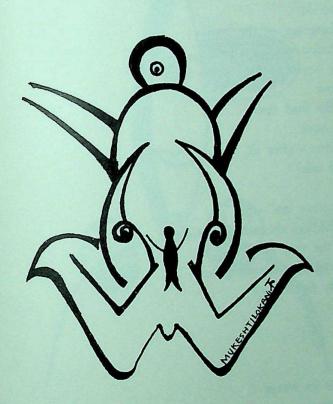
The elephant sways With its all powerful trunk The children turn To be the very personification of joy. Numerous elephants in numerous voices. The laughter that keeps Hanging in its tiny tail Never subsides in them. The elephant rolls its Eyes of marbles. The children sticking their eyes to its torso In great revelry. With the eye of one kid alone Not getting fixed, falling down It star-marks it. The 'mahout' arriving The children collect their 'changed' eyes And abuse him as the sailor. The elephants that have Never come across His pricking stick Splash and scatter blue everywhere. Wonder why but 'she' of the 'Jilebi' 'hair-do' Declaring herself fish Her pals sever their ties with her For not coming along In a procession, on an elephant.

He who, r Claimed h Receives il And move Clinging to The childr Higher and And, there

Translated

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri He who, right from the start Claimed himself 'God' Receives illustrations from them And move away in a stern march. Clinging to the tiny tail The children climb on Higher and higher. And, there goes a bell.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan



Pazhanivel / 183

'Rishi'*

The Paraphrasers!

The nude king who sets out Ascending on dictionary Opened his empty ear All too wide So as to decode The secret language of the bird. Incomprehension swelled inside. With intense wrath he looked up and Shot an arrow. Unscathed, the bird flew Higher, up above. "Doesn't matter-after all, Can the bird talk?" Said he. "Ah,yes-of course no."—So His second-fiddlers chorusing, Denouncing the very life That his mortal eyes cannot grasp As but a dirty figment of Imagination He went on.

For the bird
Which spreads its wings
All over the space
Without glancing at the nude king,
But flying in gay abandon,

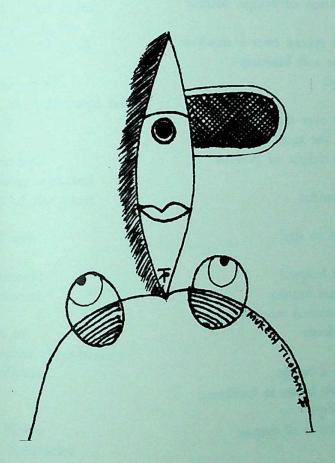
To its he The vast But A nut-sh

Translate

^{*} Original name Latha Ramakrishnan

To its heart's content— The vast universe is But A nut-shell!.

Translated from Tamil by Latha Ramakrishnan



'Rishi' / 185

SANSKRIT HAIKU POEMS

Harshdev Madhav

Moonlight spread over the sea In the disturbed mind of sage Vishvamitra the impression of nymph Menka!

Moonlight spread over a meadow: Slipped the soft brassiere of Urvashi!

Moonlight over the desert: spread on the sand the serene delight of Buddha

Elephant strides with ego as heavy as its size!

In the civil hospital
The bugs are healthy
And the fattened mosquitoes
buzz relentlessly

Telephone: a bridge Between two hearts in loneliness; Cord of hope-When destiny is all despair

How can
In the garden, of library
behind the Shrub of books
two book-worms!

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Sweet Sews A cuc EMS

How can Weak-kneed, corrupt bricks build the walls of a country strong?

Delhi: Soulless samadhis/dead buildings fainted spirit (of nation)

The brave shoes became martyrs: orphans are the wretched legs!

Death-bed in a hospital; spiders weave a web on the walls of blood

Meagre the stream of brook; the dessicated tail of a lizard!

Empty window
Tired waiting: withered
the dream of the heart.

'Hide and seek' of lizard with cockroach! Oh! Loneliness!

The drum of election; egoist chest-beating of Duryodhana!

(A sun)
Office - Worry
X wife + Spectacles

† tuberculosis = Life!

Sweet cooing
Sews the wounds of heart
A cuckoo on the mango tree

The city street becomes a prostitute; darkens the midnight

Plunges in love
A fish-couple in the water
also plunges the fisherman's mind!

Crying, the hungry infant labourer-woman has slept; pours affection the moon light of Vaishakh!

Earthquake/corpses/ Happy the vultures; shed tears, cooing crocodiles!

Some butterflies flit in my blood On the flower of your dream

Reflection of
Green-light lamps
in the water—
Trembling leaves of the tree on the bank!

Emperor of butter moving with pomp in the underworld—Mr. Citymouse!

A boat goes making me – a sea in calm moonlight.

Roots practise penance in darkness; tree mediates as the sun.

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protecting his peace in a quiet heart a sadhu goes across the noisy city

Dug out memory emerges love soiled with agony!

Labourer-woman works; milk dries in her breast; The infant lies hungry!

Lips - home of thirst; water, hut of lust-mirage

By five O'clock the busy bees get tried in a lazy office!

Rabbit in a meadow white cloud in a green sky!

Fumes of petrol; float in the sky dedicate corpses of mymphs

Translated from Sanskrit by the Poet

Harshdev Madhav / 189

Mayabhushan Nagvenkar

Sensuous hands felt my neck Subtle movements bound my tongue A gentle balm blinded me My assassin had arrived

What is heaven
The world boasts of?
My finger traces a line, along her back....
Is that it?

Salt mines are a happy place to live With yards and yards of mounds saline A drop of tear is soon lost In oceans of sorrow crystalline

I wonder if she heard it When she shut the door at last My low subdued whimper Over the creaking hinges

Will she return?
I ask myself
Watching calm river waters
Flow by

Sitting by the light
A moth settled on my face
The halo had conned him.
So together we spent the night, brooding

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Barred a drink
From your eyes
I now wait for the
Crescent moon, to tilt its cup

The curve, the sheen The jewelled clasp Her grip, her thrust My last gasp

I walked a lonely mile
In the sand
And turned back to see,
My footsteps walking towards me

There's energy crackling about me The spark has never burnt so bright I feel I am at the very best A flame, about to succumb

I found the sharp, niggling sliver Wedged in my clothings' crease I did not throw it out Like her thoughts, I let it be

The seed of sorrow
Has borne fruit
But I worry, for the seed
Has long since taken root

The tear welled, Hesitated and fell. At least, it thought for a moment Before leaving me

Flowing water Seldom stops Until the eyes Dry up

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

While white sap oozed from its raw gash The virgin rubber tree kept weeping. When it learns why she was groomed She will bleed even more

A nest of tinder
Caught fire,
It's crisp dry twigs burnt bright
The yolk resisted, but soon it also sizzled

The coffin's last nail,

She struck with precision and practiced ease.

The battered corpse

Did not even feel it

She changed me Swivelled my life around She was a turning point Which later turned in my face

A new day Breaks Exaggerating My already broken spirit

In droplets of dew Now, I see no joy, no cheer Dew is now just Passing night's tear

I tried to catch the butterfly
I missed
rued it not
It does not have long to live.

A moonlit night
Closed-door, barred windows
Both of us within
Quibbling over terms of separation

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Flows No mo

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A bird Its win I heald And so

Transl

Once again the weeping river Flows over the brim No melting snow, no pounding rain Just a season of betrayal

The moonlight stole into the room I watched it come in, and shut my eyes Like you,
It would also disappear

A bird crawled to me Its wing had snapped I healed it and she flew away And sat in another's lap

Translated from Sanskrit by the Poet



MUKESH TILOKANI 不

Mayabhushan Nagvenkar / 193

Home in Exile: "Hybridity" in A. K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel

Sabitha T.P.

The need to understand and perhaps interrogate the term "hybrid" becomes urgent when one reads the poetry of two distinguished and distinct modern Indian English poets such as A. K. Ramanujan, who spent thirty years of his life in Chicago, and Nissim Ezekiel, a poet of Jewish parentage who is never at ease at home. The significations of "home" in their poetry are crucially different from and almost conflictual with each other. In this paper, I will attempt to come to an understanding of their notions of "home" by analysing how they negotiate their identity vis-à-vis India—Ramanujan feeling at home in exile and Ezekiel feeling like an exile at home—and through such a route to problematise the valorisation of the "hybrid" migrant in the writings of Homi K. Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi.

A. K. Ramanujan—poet, linguist, and anthropologist—constructs his identity rather complexly. He has addressed the question of his "Indianness" not just in his poetry but also in some of his essays and of course, interviews. For Ramanujan, the trilingual poet and translator, his identity comes into being at the crossroads of "western" literature and ways of thinking (such as psychoanalysis and anthropology) and Tamil and Kannada literary and lived traditions. In an interview given in 1983, he says:

English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my "outer" forms – linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil and folklore give me my substance, my "inner" forms,

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I can no longer tell what comes from where (Dasgupta 33).

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One has to read the poetry and the subjectivity of Ramanujan in the light of this statement. His self is equally constructed by his western education and his Indian experiences. In Ramanujan's case, as in that of many postcolonial subjects, the partial westernisation of his self had started at home. In his essay, "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?" he speaks of his father as a hybrid subject:

He was a mathematician, an astronomer. But he was also a Sanskrit scholar, an expert astrologer...In answer to how he could read the *Gita* religiously having bathed and painted on his forehead the red and white feet of Vishnu, and later talk appreciatively about Bertrand Russell and even Ingersoll, he said, "The *Gita* is part of one's hygiene. Besides, don't you know, the brain has two lobes?" (*Collected Essays* 36)

Ramanujan's fascination with his father, who seems to traverse two different knowledge systems, is expressed in his poetry as well. In "Astronomer," he writes,

> Sky-man in a manhole With astronomy for dream, Astrology for nightmare

squinting at the parallax of black planets, his Tiger, his Hare

moving in Sanskrit zodiacs, forever troubled by the fractions (Collected Poems 134).

This "hybrid" identity could very well be that of Ramanujan's own. His poems suggest just such a coexistence of Indian and western systems of perceiving and conceiving the world or, as Ramanujan would say, that of his "outer" and "inner" forms. The "hybridity" in Ramanujan's poems is not a post-exile phenomenon. The intermingling of "western" and "Indian" ways of perceiving can be traced back to some of his earliest poems which were written in India. In "On Memory," a poem published in his first anthology *The Striders* (1966), he writes:

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Ask me: nursery rhymes on Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill: the cosmetic use of gold when the Guptas ruled: an item of costume in Shakespearian times;

Memory, in a crowd of memories, seems

to have no place at all for unforgettable things (Collected Poems 21)

The poem seems like a critique of memory itself that holds place only for the forgettable moments of experience. However, how can one talk about "unforgettable things" if they have actually been forgotten? Memory then is like Walter Benjamin's library, a site that holds together disconnected knowledges. These disconnected fragments of knowledge come from the different levels of experience of the postcolonial subject—the Mother Tongues and the Father Tongues. In the essay "Telling Tales," Ramanujan speaks about the three levels of his house which symbolise different levels of experience: downstairs where the languages are Tamil and Kannada, upstairs where his father speaks to them in English and the terrace where his father would show them the stars and tell them their names in Sanskrit and English. It deserves to be quoted at some length:

We ran up and down all these levels. Sanskrit stood for the Indian past; English for colonial India and the West, which also served as a disruptive creative other that both alienated us from and revealed us (in its terms) to ourselves; and the mother-tongues, the most comfortable and least conscious of all, for the world of women, playmates, children and servants. Each was an other to the others, and it became the business of a lifetime for some of us to keep the dialogues and quarrels alive among these three and make something of them (Collected Essays 450).

Here we see the making of the "hybrid," the creative coming together of different levels of postcolonial experience. In this postcolonial world each of the components which goes into the making of the "hybrid" acts as a sobering "other" to the others. It is important to note that these components do not just carry out a dialogue with each other, but also "quarrel"

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with each other (unlike Bhabha's "hybridity" which erases the violence of the colonial encounter. But more about that later.)

Ramanujan has written a series of poems on the Orientalist stereotype of the "Hindoo." "THE HINDOO: he reads his GITA and is calm at all events," "THE HINDOO: he doesn't hurt a fly or a spider either," and "THE HINDOO: the only risk" are three such ironical poems. The capitalised "Hindoo" draws attention (rather loudly) to the ironic mode in which these poems need to be read. Another such poem that questions and makes fun of the Orientalist "Hindoo" is "Second Sight":

...As we enter the dark, someone says from behind, 'You are Hindoo, aren't you? You must have second sight.' I fumble in my nine pockets like the night-blind son-in-law groping in every room for his wife, and strike a light to regain at one my first, and only, sight (Collected Poems 190).

The distinction between these poems and the Orientalist poems on India and Indians (by a Western author such as Kipling) is not only that the mode is ironic and self-directed. The sudden entry of the allusion to the Kannada folk-tale about the night-blind son-in-law gives this poem an Indian "inner" form. It is important to notice that in the "HINDOO" poems and poems on childhood fears and anxieties, there is no glorification of India. It is not the India of the revivalists, but an India of the postcolonial "hybrid" subject. There are many poems written in the form of prayers and chants. In "Prayers to Lord Murugan" Ramanujan writes:

Lord of the sixth sense, Give us back Our five senses... Deliver us O presence

from Sanskrit and the mythologies of night and the several roundtable mornings of London... (Collected Poems 117)

Here can be seen a rejection of the India created by the grand discourses of both colonialist historiography as well as the ancient Sanskrit traditions.

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Even when he is living in Chicago, Ramanujan continues to write poems about his village, his deep childhood fears and anxieties and perceives his experiences of Chicago through the optical devices of an Indian scholar. In Chicago, he writes about a wrestler in his village ("At Forty"), a series of poems on well known Indian myths ("Mythologies"1, 2, 3), poems based on Indian texts and folklore ("No Amnesiac King", "No Fifth Man: After an Old Sanskrit Parable"), and poems which are written in the manner of Tamil Cankam poetry ("LOVE 1: what she said", "LOVE 2: what he said groping", "LOVE 3: what he said remembering" etc.). In poems like "Conventions of Despair," "Snakes," "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears," and "Anxiety" there is intertextuality with both the Great as well as the Little traditions of India. In an interview with Rama Jha, Ramanujan says:

Yes, my knowledge of English has been deeply affected by my knowledge of Indian literature and poetics...If English cuts us from our culture it won't get us very far...Indian English, when it is good, does get its nourishment...from each individual's knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages (quoted in Das 30).

There is an inner Indian world in his poems which seems not just to "erupt into" (as Bruce King suggests) but to permeate Ramanujan's writing in Chicago (King 66). In Ramanujan's poetry, the past is not past yet, it continues to present itself to the poet's mind. The past is not just "re-presented." There is a "presencing" or bringing into being of the past in all these poems. Unlike for writers like, say, Rushdie, India is never (in) the past for Ramanujan.

However, as I have already indicated, there is no nostalgia for India in Ramanujan's poems. This is not just because India is a continuing presence for him in Chicago—he translates the poems of Tamil and Kannada saint poets while he is there and anthropology brings him back to the Kannada oral folktales of his childhood—but also because Ramanujan is well aware of the dangers of such a revivalist longing for an India that never was. In "A Report" he writes:

Hitler, housepainter who painted Warsaw Red, rumored alive in Argentina, is dead...

Yet what can I do, what shall I do, O god of death and sweet waters under or next to the salt and the flotsam, what can I do but sleep, work at love and work, blunder, sleep again refusing, lest I fall asunder

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It is not accidental that a poem that begins with Hitler ends with the cautious warning against dreaming of his Mysore house. The nostalgia or desire for a "home" in Mysore while he is in Chicago is what Ramanujan refuses to entertain. "Home" for him is not a place to go back to, but a place where one is. Remembering a conversation with Ramanujan, Keki Daruwalla says, "He never felt cut off from home. From a personal preoccupation, his interest in the two languages (i.e., Tamil and Kannada) grew into a professional concern...And since he was living with the two languages that he loved (here Daruwalla means Tamil and English), he felt at home in America" (18). U. R. Anantha Murthy too says, "I met him often in Chicago. Each time it struck me that the space around him was either a small town in Tamilnad or a village in Karnataka" (10).

If Ramanujan is at home in exile, Nissim Ezekiel is a poet who feels exiled even when he is at home (though he does acknowledge that India is his home). His negotiations of his identity are fairly complex too. After an experience of exile, he has had to come to terms with the place that he is in. His early poems show signs of the alienation he feels in India. In "Background, Casually," he speaks of his days in school:

I went to Roman Catholic school,
A mugging Jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the (sic) Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.
I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong
Repelled me by passivity.
One noisy day I used a knife.
At home on Friday nights the prayers
Were said. My morals had declined. (Ezekiel 179)

Ezekiel's is an identity strongly troubled by the fact that he belongs to a minority religion in India. He is bullied not just by the "Hindu lads" but also by Muslims and Christians, other minority communities in India. He does not feel a sense of belonging at his own home either; instead he feels alienated from the prayers at home. He has written numerous poems which evoke Judaeo-Christian motifs and forms. However, his "religious" poetry ends up being ironical, materialist (i.e., as opposed to spiritual) and sceptical. As a sceptical Jew, he knows that his identity cannot be founded on religion.

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It has to be negotiated in terms of the place that he is in, India. That is why, towards the end of the same poem he comes to accept that "My backward place is where I am" (181). Ezekiel finds a place in India for himself. In a poem titled "In India," he writes about the "hybrid" place that India is:

> The Anglo-Indian gentlemen Drank whisky in some Jewish den With Muslims slowly creeping in Before or after prayers (133).

In Ezekiel's poetry, unlike in Ramanujan's, we see the minorities eating, drinking, celebrating in India. This too is India; it gives a home to the Jew and the Muslim. It makes the exile come back and call India home. This is why one has to read Ezekiel's ironic poems on India just as one would read Ramanujan's ironic poems on the "Hindoo": as written from within. One could even look at poems like "The Railway Clerk" and "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S." as introducing the hitherto forbidden flavour of "Indian" English to English poetry. Gieve Patel quotes Ezekiel's response to Naipaul's disillusionment with India:

> My quarrel with Mr. Naipaul...is not because of these condemnatory judgements of his...My quarrel is that Mr. Naipaul is so often uninvolved and unconcerned. He writes exclusively from the point of view of his own dilemma, his temperamental alienation from his mixed background...I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian. (Patel xxii)

Ezekiel's conscious choice to belong to India is expressed most vibrantly here. Even though an "outsider," he considers himself Indian and immerses himself in the "hybridity" of this home. The critical view of India that he harbours is seen by Bruce King as a mature postcolonial nationalist irony. He locates Ezekiel's nationalism in his conscious choice to return to India from England and his deep involvement with Indian politics and culture (he was part of M. N. Roy's Radical Democratic Movement) (King 42). The important thing is that by consciously making the choice to belong to India, Ezekiel broadens the horizon of "India" to include postcolonial Jews to its long list of immigrants who found a home in India from the precolonial times onwards.

What is common to these seemingly disparate poets—Ramanujan and

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Ezekiel—is their conception of "home" as a "hybrid" place. It is not an "elsewhere" as Rushdie says, nor do they "create fictions...imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10). India is not a mythic place for these poets; it is a continuing presence. Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi celebrate the "displaced" space of the immigrant writer as conducive to new possibilities and new knowledges. I would like to suggest that these new possibilities are indeed open to the "hybrid" writers at home as well, not necessarily just to the migrants. In fact, the migrant subject, when he/she writes about the diasporic space as a privileged space, might be criticised for overlooking the continued oppression of the diasporic people in the host countries. The in-between place of the "hybrid" at home is as productive of new perspectives as the diasporic place of migrant writers.

Homi Bhabha's Location of Culture addresses those who live "border lives," on the margins of different nations. Living at the border, at the edge, requires embracing the contrary logic of the border and using it to rethink the dominant ways in which we represent history, identity, and community. For Bhabha, the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing. Bhabha urges that we must "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and...focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity" (1). The "in-between" space of Bhabha, as we have seen, is also that of the postcolonial writers who are not necessarily migrants. "Hybridity", for the two poets we have looked at, is the condition of their existence even at home. However, my disagreement with Bhabha is as much over his exclusion of the homegrown "hybrid" within his category of the "hybrid" as over his evocation of the Freudian unheimlich to constitute the notion of the "hybrid." For Freud, the unheimlich (often translated as "unhomely" or "uncanny") is the "name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light' (225). In Bhabha's thinking, the disruption of received totalising narratives of individual or group identity made possible at the border can be described as an unheimlich moment where all those forgotten in the construction of the identity of the nation return to haunt such exclusionary ways of identityformation. For Bhabha this is where literature plays an important part. He suggests that literature concerning "the migrant, the colonised or political refugees" could take on the task of "unhousing" received ways of thinking by the use of "hybridity" (12). For Ramanujan and Ezekiel the "hybrid" space is not the space of eruptions of the unheimlich (unhomely), but a space within home itself. India is conceived of by these poets as always already

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri conducive to "hybridity;" this is what Ramanujan symbolises in the three levels of his home where different languages and knowledge systems are adopted. India is the home where many identities co-exist. It is like the house in Ramanujan's poem "Small-scale Reflections on a Great House;"

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Sometimes I think that nothing that ever comes into this house goes out. Things come in every day to lose themselves among other things lost long ago among other things lost long ago... (Collected Poems 96)

The house where everything that comes in ends up staying could be a metaphor for India itself. India is the house where all communities who enter find a home. Ramanujan who says that the Indian way of thinking is "context-sensitive" as opposed to the "context-free" or universalistic western way of thinking, means precisely this: that India can produce someone like his father whose two lobes of the brain house astronomy and astrology at the same time (*Collected Essays* 34-50). India can house many different identities not by subsuming them, but by adopting a "context-sensitive" perception towards disparate identities. Home itself is the "hybrid" space.

In both Bhabha and the revivalists, "home" is conceived of as a monolithic, unified location. It is because Bhabha thinks of "home" as monolithic that he has to speak of a "third" space of the "hybrid" who is at home in neither of the two cultures it is shaped by. A home without borders or a "hybrid" home is the politically viable postcoloniality envisioned by both Ramanujan and Ezekiel. The question of hybridity is linked not just with postcoloniality, but also with questions of secularism and democracy. Home as a hybrid space is a political understanding of the plural nature of a country like India. To avoid a majoritarian politics, it is important to use the concept of "hybridity." However it cannot be a hybridity that resides nowhere, or at the margins of discourses and nations, but a hybridity that resides at home. This is the way in which we can perceive a "hybrid" self in the writings of Ramanujan and Ezekiel. What Bhabha does is not to find a home for the exiled, but to exile the very notion of "home" from his discourse (this is the second sense suggested by the title of this paper "Home in Exile") thus making impossible a political intervention for the rights of the oppressed immigrants (or marginalised "others") in the country which houses them.

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Anandmath or The Sacred Brotherhood by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, tr. by Julies J. Lipner, Penguin, 2005, Pp.315, Rs. 495/-

This book throws up all the usual questions about translation as an activity and as the process at the end of which a literary text, with the usual responsibility imputed to literary texts (to edify, entertain, educate or a combination of these, according to your own proclivities), is supposed to emerge. None of these questions are unasked but all of them are unanswered with any finality. In the strange position of having recently had to translate a portion of the same text myself, my understanding of all these problems in very specific relation to Bankimchandra's classic work, prompts me to make the remarks recorded below. In that sense these are at best a comparison of two experiences of 'reading' the same text more than a century after it has been written, from two different subject positions, and subsequently, choosing a code, a register and an aim on which to base a translation of what we found communicable in our respective reading experiences.

The audible milieu that Bankimchandra inhabited, and to a great extent, helped to create, is neither mine nor Lipner's, though I can claim to belong to the same source-language nesting-culture as the writer's. Lipner's is a lovingly cultivated skill in the language not his own, though it was on the periphery of his experience almost all his life, as he points out (p 71, 124). Hence, he hears the text and makes it audible (p 115) to us from that very threshold. The sonorous sanskritised ring of Bankimchandra's language becomes smoothly flowing, readable English prose, and no doubt for the target language reader, this is exactly what is desired. This move reminds me of Pannwitz's comment,

... Our translators, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for

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(Quoted by Walter Benjamin)

And so, we are prompted to ask, to whom is Lipner loyal? Or more generally, and perhaps theoretically, to whom must the translator be loyal in the final analysis – the author or the reader? If the translator sees himself as an author in his own right (how many translators will admit to doing so in broad daylight?) surely his loyalties rest, with the reader. If he can convert himself into the medium through which the author's words are transmitted, then it's another story altogether and these two different positions (the theoretically inclined will say 'politics' or 'ideology', but what else is there besides these?) will yield two translations different in minute detail. I am not about to judge which is better and which worse—indeed this is an area which will never ever be conclusively settled as long as the power politics between languages continues in the guise that we have known in the historical conjuncture of modernity.

It is from this vantage point that I take issue with a number of choices Lipner has made. Here I shall refer to only two instances, because the reasons for both these have been painstakingly outlined in Lipner's 124 page Introduction. Incidentally, a question to the publisher—was there any special reason for choosing this punishingly minute font? Surely a scholarly edition is allowed to be a little thicker than this volume of 314 pages?

One of these is the translation of the title itself - Anandamath or The Sacred Brotherhood. Lipner elaborates the reasons for his choice (p 44-6). Taking some expunged lines from the several versions and the first five editions of the text, Lipner imputes to Bankimchandra the intention reflected in his own translation, as opposed to the rendering of Nares Chandra Sen Gupta (The Abbey of Bliss) as well as France Bhattacharya (Le Hermitage du Felicite). The idea of a common name, "Ananda", to designate all the members of the celibate Santaan community who inhabit the monastery or hermitage (math) leads Lipner to deduce that Bankimchandra intended to indicate this suffix to the names of all the central male characters in the title itself. Hence Anandamath: his rendering 'sacred brotherhood' is a gloss on this, highlighting the singular lack of bliss or felicite in the community, their active sense of serious purpose, their dedication and the construal of their duty as worship, devotion to the nation as mother. One is amazed once more at the economy and resonance of Bangla as a language: true enough, the word 'math' indicates all this. It also invokes the ideas of ascetic penance, celibacy, the discipline and dedication of a religious order. But does not 'ananda' also demand equal weightage? What is the philosophical implication of the word, and why does Bankimchandra use it as a suffix to the names

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri of his central male characters? 'Ananda', the reader may rightly intervene, became an important philosophical category adduced to the Vedantist-deist-Brahmo spiritualism, brought into common currency by Rabindranath. All the more reason to seek the meaning of 'Ananda' in Bankimchandra's Gitainspired philosophy of action. Was this word a singular cause for the popularity of the novel as a nationalist text—because it signalled the transcendent bliss of selfless dedication to a cause, an ideal higher than oneself, in this case the mother nation? Is that why all the members of the order have 'Ananda' as the suffix to their names? Is it an indication of the inspiration that the leader of the order draws from the ideal of transforming 'the mother—as-she-is' into the 'mother as-she-will-be,' in the glorious future? Does 'ananda' become the goal of 'math'? Lipner focusses our attention only on the rigors of fulfilling the duties imposed by membership in the order—he ignores the affective element without which the assuming of these responsibilities is nothing short of (or nothing more than) an onerous burden. That is manifestly not Bankimchandra's intent and that is in fact the core of the philosophy of renunciation and action that characterizes the discourse of 'dharma' that he forged out of his knowledge of what, for want of better words, we call 'Hindu' 'scripture'. The translator faces a curious problem with the text-name anyway. He can leave it intact, especially if it is a proper name (which it can be read as here) and provide a detailed gloss. He can make an interpretive translation, an act fraught with peril. And he can use the original, adding a subtitle. Lipner has used the third method here, but I submit that for all his meticulous efforts, the subtitle skims the text, limiting it to one of its aspects, a quite literal one at that, and subtly shuts out the full resonance of the classic work. This may be (and I do not insist on this in general, but my reading position is, as I have indicated, different from Lipner's, historically) limiting its most potent force, reducing it to a piece of flawless-and lifeless-mechanism.

And this is all the more surprising given Lipner's very astute and wellworked out arguments in support of his reading of the novel. The second instance that I cite here is his translation of bhugarbha, as 'the bowels of the earth', which he describes as idiomatic (p51). In his fine critical introduction however, he demonstrates with rare skill 'the theme of death and spiritual rebirth in and about the forest setting'(p58), and comments 'the semantic association of the forest with the womb is very clear (p 51). What prevents him then from translating bhugarbha literally as 'the womb of the earth'? It fits in perfectly with his interpretation of the text, and points the target language reader directly to the author's intentions, conscious or unconscious. Speculating on why Lipner does not take this route is, then, an interesting exercise. Do the very well crafted 124-page-long Introduction to the novel,

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and the extremely commendable critical apparatus which ought to be a model for future work, stand in support of the novel or in addition to it? Are they meant to justify the translation or aid the target language reader to reach where the source language reader may arrive without their help? This seems a petty and unfair question after the monumental work that Lipner has put in, but the question arises, nevertheless because of these apparently small decisions he has made. Is it true that when the Bangla speaker hears bhugarbha he thinks 'bowels' instead of 'womb, or is it that he thinks of the word as a whole? As a Bangla speaker (and this is not the voice of final authority, but the submission of one who translates from Bangla into English) I am inclined to think the latter is true. Why, then, delete the strong conscious or unconscious implications of choosing such a potent word by translating it idiomatically rather than literally? Why (surely unintentionally on Lipner's part) is santaan translated as 'children' rather than the more general 'offspring'? Santaan's resonance in Bangla is much deeper than the equally commonly-used 'children' in English, and surely that too is part of Bankimchandra's intention?

Rachel Fell McDermott hails the publishing of this volume thus "We have waited one hundred years for this book....At last." I fully agree. But with the Zadig-esque worm (please note the choice of word, intended to evoke the dismantling of Paradise) that entered the cultural milieu of Bengal a couple of centuries ago, I would add—"But"

Ipsita Chanda

The Rains and the Roots, The Indian English Novel Then and Now, by A S Dasan, pub. by Sahrdayata—Global Fellowship Academy, Mysore. Pp. 156. Rs 280.

There are three traditions of or strains in Indian English novel, and they prevailed until Salman Rushdie introduced a fourth one – magical realism – with *Midnight's Children*, in the early eighties. One can even say that he also succeeded in obliterating the third almost completely. The other two, however, continue to hold their own, though vastly differing in the narrative styles. These were all introduced, almost simultaneously in the thirties of the twentieth century by Mulk Raj Anand with *Untouchable*, R K Narayan with *Swami and Friends*, and Raja Rao with *The Serpent and the Rope*. In his non-

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academic academic study of the evolution of the Indian English novel, and its dissemination of the Indian way of life, A S Dasan seeks to define them as critical realism, natural realism and metaphysical humanism.

Dasan's strength is also his weakness. The promise with which he sets out to define the parameters of Indian English novel ultimately fall far short of the expected targets. Let us take a look at some of his findings. He contends: "Modern Indian English fiction writing is not a flow of one single tradition. Instead, it embraces and sustains multiple traditions and diverse styles. Indian English fiction in recent times has witnessed the most significant development in the aesthetic and thematic ordering of fictional events... Contemporary Indian English novels have thrown up new signs of identity, opened up innovative sites for collaboration and contestation." But he does not try to corroborate his thesis. In fact, such profound statements have generally not been backed up with sound arguments with the result the book ends up as a flowing narrative but not a critical evaluation. Though that is perfectly in order.

While in one breath he contends that "more and more number of women in India are beginning to question the existing paradigms, "in another he states "Indian women's consciousness straddling the worlds of tradition and modernity has been one of the major themes Indian women writers have been preoccupied with." And through both contentions he seems not to commend the successful attempts of the younger lot, beginning with Arundhati Roy, to not only break fresh grounds but also adding a totally new dimension to this writing where gender is no longer the bone of contention. Where major socio-political-religious matters have been analysed and explored. They have successfully raised the bar through language, style and narrative techniques. In this context it is interesting to note that "there are as many as fifty women Indian English writers who outnumber men, is a significant milestone in our literary culture."

The issue of home and abroad, diasporic or otherwise, has been dealt with in 'The Rushdie Phenomenon and the Indian English Novel Today'. This being the crucial moment, the turning point, or the defining moment in the growth of Indian English novel needed more than a casual look even in a survey of this nature. But then "Dasan is fired by his own idealism, and in the euphoria of a self-propelling enthusiasm," points out C D Srinath in his short, compassionate foreword to the book. And, therefore, often tends to be carried away, though it must be said that, fortunately, it does not underscore the merit of the book. He almost never loses sight of objectivity. There are no evident biases. Dasan's big strength here is the flow of his narrative, even if not his arguments. To borrow from Srinath again: "Dasan is too refined and sophisticated to explicitly record a fall from Then

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to Now' but hopes, as we all do, that the fall of the rain on the roots is a cycle that goes on forever and that hope for regeneration is eternal."

Dasan surprisingly misses on the important aspect of 'the alien insiders' or 'diasporic Indian writer' exploring the mind and psyche of the Indian diaspora itself: an entirely new world, as against a dated-or-otherwise investigation of Indians in India, a criticism not without roots. The post-Rushdie-Midnight's Children "has started embracing multiculturalism and pluralism in the midst of cross-fertilization of ideas and new forms of cultural exchanges in the context of humanity's drift towards transnational cultural and social identity" sounds inadequate. That with the notable example of Vikram Seth's An Equal Music, and stray isolated instances in the overall narrative, no diasporic Indian writer has sought to do interplay of cross-cultural phenomenon.

"More and more diasporic Indian writings interface politics of identity with poetics of identity." Here Dasan also raises the point of 'subject' or thematic authenticity, but then like many other relevant issues, does not elaborate, especially on the question of rootedness or non-rootedness and "social responsibility" because the very concept of diasporic writing is being extended to 'not only writers of Indian origin living outside India but also writers who have moved away from their birthplace to within India." No attempt is made to identify these writers, and how relevant are their works in terms of authenticity and "social responsibility."

So what do the trends indicate in terms of the future of Indian English novel? "What was the Indian English novel then and what is it now?" Dasan raises important questions. And quotes Jennifer Edelson in support of his queries; 'in a world already divided by so many labels, categories and distinctions' "some questions may be unwarranted, some digressive and some worth asking." But he himself does not provide any answers. He does, however, feel, referring to an unidentified Siddartha Deb hopes of "old territories may be flattened but new landscapes will emerge, and they are likely to reconfigure the modes and forms of the Indian English novel minimizing, in course of time, the distance between Indian English writing and Indian regional literatures" in its ultimate quest of definitive 'authentic' Indian voice.

Devoid of any academic jargon Dasan's attempt will be eminently useful in initiating the unfamiliar into the complex world of the Indian English novel. It demonstrates a clarity of thought and purpose. The expression is simple. Its singular achievement lies in being comprehensive and objective at the same time.

Suresh Kohli / 209

The Unsevered Tongue, translated poetry by Bengali women, tr. Amitabha Mukherjee, Nandimukh Samsad, India, 2005, Rs.75/-

never
I won't be the candle wax
That you'll burn to write your words
I won't be the soft cotton flax
Brewing warm desire in your pillow"

'Never' by Kabita Sinha

You have to raise a family This wild prancing around Does it become you? Shame Puti

'Not you, Puti' by Bijaya Mukhopadhyay

While we are poor And our faults are countless Our love for Bangla Is surely timeless?

'Tongue' by Mallika Sengupta

Women's bodies have always attracted violent assault. Attacks, verbal and physical have come from not just outsiders but from the intimate enemies within the so called secure domestic space. Every part of a woman's anatomy has either been celebrated in poetry and song, or slashed and maimed according to the mindless rage and desire for power that is implicated in any act of violence.

Yet women continue to challenge the pillars of patriarchy that will not allow her recognition, motion or voice. Though Mukherjee selects such a potentially violent title for his slim black book of poetry translations of about 57 pages in all, inclusive of the glossary and bio-notes, the first technical anomaly is that instead of "eight outstanding poets" the book includes poems and translations of seven Bengali women poets.

But literature is not arithmetic, so this doesn't merit too much attention unless of course the translator as transcreator had included himself as the eight poet, the one who lurks, fleets and flies but is never trapped with a signed poem. But then the enigma of gender lingers as the translator/transcreator is male.

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The title of the book is inspired by Mallika Sengupta's poem "Khanaa's song". The selections from the works of the seven poets listed in the contents aptly highlight the deep and sincere engagement of the translator. The translations are eminently readable and illustrate the competence and care of the translator in not only selecting a significant number of powerful poems but also in transferring into English the nuances of the Bengali original versions. The poets whose poems have been translated by Mukherjee are Kabita Sinha, Bijaya Mukhopadhyay, Debarati Mitra, Namita Chaudhuri, Mallika Sengupta, Taslima Nasrin and Mandakranta Sen. All seven poets are very well-known and their powerful poetry addresses women's issues as well as macro-concerns ranging from use of the mother tongue to the politics of identity.

However, Mukherjee has very freely translated most of the poems, more often prioritising beauty in favour of fidelity, as stated in the prefatory section of the book. As most cultured, educated Indians have bi-lingual skills, it is for the poets to decide whether they feel contented with all the intrusions and absences in the translated texts. Mukherjee's zest is admirable, but aesthetic beauty is not synonymous with inaccuracy, especially when the original version is not intimidating to the process of translation. As for example in page three "the poem Never" by Kabita Sinha ends with the word asleep. The sentence seems odd and the original does not use it-"like insects through the pages of books asleep" (Jantrana amake kate, jemon puthi ke kate wuie) Or say, in page 27 phuler stobok is translated as "single carnation". Why carnation—it's not a flower ordinarily known in Bengal except its presence in designer florists' boutiques. It is for the poets to give the final verdict, whether such translations, which undoubtedly seem eminently readable, can be permissible, as sometimes these intrusions may shift the nuances of the region-specific, culture-specific linguistic inputs. Translations that neither adhere to Eugene Nida's well-defined dual categories, the formal equivalence translation technique or the dynamic equivalence translation technique appear more as an act of inspired selection and transcreation, as in the case of Mukherjee's translated poems included in 'the unsevered tongue.'

This reviewer has always scrupulously avoided nit-picking in a translated version. But as Mukherjee's book gives us the original versions on the left hand page of each translated poem, sometimes the eye is drawn to savour the original and compliment the translation. But this often leads to confusion, as too many intrusions seem to have been inserted. In most cases these could have been avoided as they merely thwart the natural nuances of the original. Also, the reason for including Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri in a book predominantly showcasing poets from West Bengal could have been explained in the Preface. If, as it is obvious the cultural links and shared mother tongues can be cited as determining factors, perhaps inclusion of a few other women poets of Bangladesh would have made this book a balanced representation of women poets of both Bengal and Bangladesh.

However, along with the translated poems the glossary, bio-notes and the title index all bear out the fact that 'the unsevered tongue' has been an engaged labour of love for a language and culture which is integral to the translator's sense of his own identity...'he has managed to become a resolute Bengali' as stated in the bio-note, despite having lived in many parts of the world since childhood. Amitabha Mukherjee's endeavour as translator is commendable, especially so, as there is complete lack of any similarity between the source and target languages—Bangla and English unlike say Bangla and Hindi, which have many easily recognizable common words, shared sentiments and mutually familiar regional cultures.

After all, translation is a craft, a skill perfected through consistent application, as J.M.Coetzee stated in a recent article published in "The Australian" on January 28, 2006:

> Translation seems to me a craft in a way that cabinetmaking is a craft. There is no substantial theory of cabinet-making, and no philosophy of cabinet-making except the ideal of being a good cabinet-maker, plus a handful of precepts relating to tools and to types of wood.

> For the rest, what there is to be learned must be learned by observation and practice. The only book on cabinet-making I can imagine that might be of use to the practitioner would be a humble handbook.

Coetzee's essay also appears in the latest edition of Meanjin (Volume 64.4, Tongues: On Translation), www.meanjin.unimelb.edu.au and will be included in a coming book Translation and the Classic (Oxford University Press).

Sanjukta Dasgupta

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Twentieth Century Telugu Poetry by Syamala Kallury, Shipra Publications, 2006, New Delhi, Pp. 206, Rs.395/-, US \$ 18

For quite long it has been a regretful feeling that Telugu enjoyed the dubious distinction of being least known outside its linguistic barrier, for its long literary tradition and remarkable excellence. This has been so, in spite of the fact that Telugu is the second largest spoken language in India with a literary tradition going back to over a thousand years. But the feeling has been occasionally assuaged by the spasmodic efforts by enthusiasts and committed and competent translators who tried to take the rich variety of Telugu poetry to a wider (inter-)national readership and appreciation. Mention may be made of This Tense Time, by V.Mohan Prasad, who painstakingly compiled the translations of modern Telugu poetry; Post-Independence Telugu Poetry by the present reviewer, who has himself translated several poets of the post-Independence period, articulating the multiple voices of poetic consciousness. He has also published anthologies of translations of selected poems of Balagangadhara Tilak, C. Narayana Reddy, and Dasarathi. V.V.B. Rama Rao also brought out two volumes of translations of selected poems. V.Narayana Rao published an anthology of his own translations, besides of the poems of Dhurjati. Many more translations - especially, of novels and short stories - have been appearing in recent times. It is gratifying that a large band of translators is at work nowadays to perform what Allen Tate once called "for ever impossible and for ever necessary" task of translation. To this ever-widening sphere of selfless enthusiasts I have pleasure in inviting Syamala Kallury, who has been carrying out this enterprise for some time now.

The translator has spread her net very wide and tried to offer samples of twentieth century Telugu poetry representative of the earlier celebrated poets like Venkata Parvateesa Kavulu, Viswanatha Satyanarayna, Vedula Satyanarayana and Devulapalli Krishna Sastry as well as modern poets like Vaseera, C.V.Subba Rao, Endiuri Sudhakar and Sikhamani. The gamut of sampling is surely amazing and deserves to be commended. Many of the popular poetic pieces which inspired generations of the Telugu people—like Rayaprolu Subba Rao's "Motherland," Gurazada Appa Rao's "Purnamma, A Golden Doll," Adavi Bapiraju's "Godavari in Floods," Nayani Subba Rao's "A Song for My Mother" are impressive in their English habitation. There are then the renderings of subjectively selected poems of Sri Sri, Narayana Reddy, Dasarathi, Tilak of the earlier generation, along

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri with those of the younger generation like Nikhileswar, Mahaswapna, Winnakota Ravishankar. Adequate sampling Cherabanda Raju and Vinnakota Ravishankar. Adequate sampling of the poems of well-known poets like Arudra, Bairagi, Ajantha and Kundurti adds to the value of the offering. Also, Syamala has taken care to provide ample space for the feminine (not necessarily feminist) poetic activity in Telugu by including the work of poets like Jayaprabha, Kondepudi Nirmala, Volga, Mehajabin and Patibandla Rajini, apart from a few of the poems of her own. The anthology in Telugu of original poems, which was edited by the author and published by National Book Trust, is the base for the translator's present work.

Surely, the inclusion or omission of poets/poems is the unquestionable prerogative of the translator. Even so, a few choices make me feel uncomfortable. Only three poems of Sri Sri, the pioneer of Modern Telugu poetry, and only one each of Seshendra Sarma and Bairagi have been included, while a relatively minor poet like Ravishankar gets three. The total omission of Nagnamuni and Srikantha Sarma is intriguing. However, one realizes that the limitations of space are a major constraint and it is not feasible to include all that one would really like to.

The introduction tracing the evolution of Telugu poetry since the time of Nannaya through the intellectualisms of avadhanams and the politically committed exercises and the other trends serves the purpose of acquainting the non-Telugu readers - even the younger Telugu generation who can hardly read a word of Telugu, owing to their elitist education - with the rich variety of Telugu poetry. The detailed notes about the poets is bound to be of immense help.

It is unfortunate that in an elegantly produced volume like this there are a few inelegancies and even inaccuracies. For instance, Parijaatapaharanam is not the work of Peddana (p 13) but of Thimmana. The appellation amatya has been liberally conferred on almost all the ancient poets; only Tikkana was an amatya. On page 14 lead should read led.

Syamala Kallury must be congratulated for accomplishing a difficult but essential task aimed at transculturation by taking Telugu literature across the linguistic barriers. It is surely, as she observed, "the single most satisfying work" she had done and it will be welcomed by all lovers of literature across the globe.

S.S. Prabhakar Rao

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A Screen from Sadness by Sitakant Mahapatra, DC Books Kottayam, 2004, Pp. 172, Rs. 75/-

Upon hearing of WH Auden's migration to the USA, TS Eliot is said to have remarked that his problem of how to answer the question, whether he was an English or American poet, had now been solved. For, Eliot could now say with confidence that whatever Auden was he was the other. Jayanta Mahapatra, who, after having written poetry in English for three decades, turned to write in Oriya, has reasons to celebrate veteran Oriya poet Sitakant Mahapatra's decision to write poetry in English. For, to the troublesome question of whether he was an Indian English or Oriva poet, Javanta Mahapatra has now found a convenient answer: whatever Sitakant Mahapatra is he is the other. I say all this, of course, in jest, and by way of expressing the sense of collective frustration that future generation of scholars might feel while reading A Screen from Sadness (SfS). For, SfS might easily be mistaken to be a collection of English poems in the absence of any indication to the contrary. Neither the title page, nor the blurb, nor the Foreword (with a clear mention that it is written originally by HP Das, translated by S Mund) describes these poems as translations by the poet himself. Though, as a native reader of Sitakant Mahapatra's Oriya poetry, one knows that this book of English poems is actually a translation of the poet's Oriya volume Pradakshina (2002)—which itself comprised for thematic coherence a selection of poems from earlier collections—the hapless reader has no way of ascertaining the fact. In fact some of the pieces are reworkings rather than accurate translations, even with new titles. Thus it is possible that the poet expects us to take him seriously as an Indian-English poet. In so doing he follows Manoj Das's example who does not call his English short stories "translations" from the Oriya original, but new works in English.

Sitakant Mahapatra has dedicated the poems in his volume to Salvatore Quasimodo, no doubt, even borrowing the title from his poem, "Wind at Tindari". But right from the 1960s till now his poetry is redolent of the Anglo-American modernist tradition. Undoubtedly his critics have exaggerated his use of the so-called "mythical method," favourite of the high modernists, as if there is nothing else to his poetry. But in poem after poem Sitakant strives to infuse a mythical dimension to nearly every contemporary persona or experience. In the poem about his father's death, for example,

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Digitized by Ava Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri he sees the personal tragedy in terms of an epic struggle between "The Enemy" (Death) and his father's kith and kin:

We stacked everything in our camp. The armoury bristled with injectibles of all kinds, innumerable medicine bottles, Ganga's holy water, bottles of precious blood...

We put him at the *chakravyuha*'s centre...

This temptation to juxtapose contemporaneity and antiquity is simply too strong for Sitakant. Even when he avoids the temptation, his critics find the mythical method in all his work, as Rabi S. Mishra has pointed this out in one of his very perceptive essays. Many Oriya critics have noticed Sitakant's moving away from his early high-modernist mode to a kind of simplicity and directness of speech which is most welcome. Culled from different Oriya collections spread over the years, these poems have been arranged with a pattern in mind: in a way they trace the poet-persona's relationship down generations. The first poem is about his Grandfather, the second is about his grandmother. The middle poems are about his parents and wife. Then he moves on to his relationship with his children and grandchildren. The poem about the death of his father that I have discussed above has been much commented on by critics ranging from JM Mohanty to Namwar Singh. The latter in fact calls "Mahapatra's poems about the death of his father...among his very best, and they express the poet's equation with time."

However, this high praise seems justified when one reads the poems in the original, or in some translations which are not Sitakant's. JM Mohanty not known as a translator uses his own translations in some of his critical essays, which appear to me to be superior to Mahapatra's. I offer the two versions of the same passage by way of proving my point. The following is what appears in the book under review:

In the casual evening conversation Spring returns, most unexpectedly; a mad wind blows through the blind, lampless room.

Here is Mohanty's translation:

With your evening tales comes spring out of season, the wind blows in a frenzy in the blind dark room.

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The first version is awkward, the second, precise and sharp, carrying much of the charm of the original. This is generally the case with the book under review.

The wellsprings for Sitakant's emotions in poetry are his native land and close relatives. While reading the poems in the volume, one would think that Sitakant's emotions function in the narrow confines of the self and the family and seldom if ever reach out to the world outside the poet's own. Yet, that is not how his Oriya poetry speaks to the reader.

Reading his Oriya poems one cannot help sharing his personal sense of grief and joy depending on the occasion in the poem. They carry a kind of resonance and vitality that has come to the poet after decades of practicing the craft and polishing his native idiom. When one reads them one feels the natural lilt and flow that is simply missing in most of these translated/reworked English poems. Let me repeat that Sitakant's original poetry in Oriya, the same poems about which I am speaking here, are among the best contemporary Indian poetry that is on display. But in translation, they are a pale reflection of their Oriya counterpart. Thus the title of Sitakant's volume acquires some unintended irony. "The screen form sadness" is actually the screen that the English of the translated version erects between the poet's emotions and the reader.

Sumanyu Satpathy

The Temple Backyard and Other Stories by Raghuveer Chaudhary, tr. from Gujarati by Suresh Shukla, Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Gandhinagar, Pp.260. Rs.140/-

Raghuveer Chaudhary occupies an eminent place in the literary firmament of Gujarati. Recipient of numerous awards including the Ranjitram Gold Medal as also the Sahitya Akademi (Delhi) award, his creative output has been voluminous. Poetry, novel, short story, criticism, travelogue and drama, he has tried his hand successfully with every genre enriching the fast-growing bulk of Gujarati literature.

Like in other regional language literatures, the short story in Gujarati has been the most widely-adopted form of literary expression. Having recognised the need for the non-Gujarati reader to appreciate Gujarati literature as also the growing interest generally in regional language literatures, Gujarat Sahitya Academy has undertaken the publication of translations

Amina Amin | 217

of works of Gujarati writers into English and other Indian languages. Needless to say, a writer like Raghuveer Chaudhary needs to be read

The Temple Backyard and Other Stories is an anthology of eighteen short stories translated by Suresh Shukla. It must have been difficult to select these stories from among the hundred or more that Raghuveer Chaudhary has written. The fictional world of the writer is far-ranging both in terms of theme and technique. One wonders if Chaudhary's reading in Hindi literature – as a teacher he taught Hindi both at the graduate and post-graduate levels - played a crucial role in shaping his art of writing.

Chaudhary uses innovative devices to unfold plot and develop characters. The title story: "The Temple Backyard" stands out from the rest by virtue of its specific socio-cultural colouring. Its interest lies in the way the writer shows how politics operates even among small town people. Written mainly in the native speech of a village, it lends veracity to the story. This one and a couple of other stories in the selection show the extent to which Chaudhary's sensibility is rooted in the ethos of his own village Bapupura in the Mehsana district of North Gujarat

The stories are apparently simple portraying ordinary situations in the life of ordinary people but they show the writer's deft use of irony and satire, humour and compassion. By and large the stories project interrelationships like man-woman in "Ms.Prabha Mehta" and childrenparents, in "The Key", "A Chain" or "The Story of a Happy Family". Most of the stories have a linear narrative movement with a clear storyline. However there are one or two like "The Bundle" or "Snowfall" which leaves the reader guessing. "Nilam", "Not Love But..." and "The Third Person" portray how the marriage of a girl, however educated she is, still remains a source of anxiety not only for her parents but for herself also. "Lalita's Death" shows how the unnatural death of their daughter leaves the parents confused and helpless.

Reading through The Temple Backyard and Other Stories, I was reminded of A.K.Ramanujan's observation that 'a translator hopes not only to translate a text but hopes to translate a non-native reader into a native one.' I wonder how far the present translation will succeed in doing that. I was surprised to read through this translation, replete with grammatically incorrect English, faulty syntax and cumbersome sentence structures not to mention erratic punctuation and quotation marks. While a translator needs to take liberties while translating meaning from the source language to the target language, he cannot deviate from the original to such an extent that he violates the meaning of the original. Sadly, this is also what

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has happened at several places in the translation.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri T_O list only a few examples:

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age an hat Both of them did not speak to each other for five days. Nearly five days passed by. They lipped a little but there was nothing personal. The Mukhi Ganesh had this type of peculiarity. Irrespective of any personal drawback but never to be submissive to wife and once stated in a public place should never be modified at any cost(8).

Vernal used to be vociferate with the boys at school for the whole day but here he could not say at all, he was slow in giving a smile. He could speak only after turning his face. 'On the contrary, I feel Happy!' He used to say lowly(90).

Now I know, there could be many young girls who connive at their own interest knowing fully well become submissive to those ribald sensuous and fell a prey to the deceitful scheme and impose on self-suffering(26).

Due to snowfall, everything becomes standstill. (245).

How anyone else is to know about me?(114).

Distance was fairly long and there was hardly any possibility of reaching by calling him(63).

I know that your mental make-up is fairly good than mine(36).

Nilam's mother had fear till the last moment. Won't be there mishappening?(27).

Suketu, when do you think of to be quite an auspicious day?(34).

If through translation Gujarati writers have to be placed on 'the bigger stage of world literature' (Publisher's note), manuscripts of translations will have to be ruthlessly edited for readers to understand and appreciate not merely the translation but also gauge the aesthetic value of the original. The present translation needs to be rigorously edited right from p.v of the volume.

Amina Amin

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Endless Rain by Meena Arora Nayak, Penguin Books India, Pp.324, Rs.295.

Endless Rain written by Meena Arora Nayak, as the title suggests, succinctly captures the ambivalent spirit of the endless violence of the freedom movement (jihad) of Kashmir. The novel is divided into two parts. The first part revolves around the life of Maqsood a Kashmiri Muslim who is in the family business of Kashmiri carpets. The story begins with the birth of Ali on 17 December 1971, the day Bangladesh declared her Independence. Ali later on becomes the prototype of the misguided youths of Kashmir, who are mere puppets in the hands of pseudo-Jihadis. At the very outset of the novel the paradoxes inherent in the theme have been highlighted by the author when just after the birth of Ali the radio buzzes with the news of war and violence: "Salahudin stood, shocked, holding the whimpering infant at arm's length, the ritual interrupted, words of violence uttered in the boy's ear instead of the elemental; sounds of Allah's mercy, Ali – the warrior's name – already pronounced. What could this mean? Khuda raham, Salahudin whispered fearfully, clutching the boy to his chest" (3).

In the first part the story progresses at multiple levels. At one level it depicts the conventional Muslim patriarchal structure by the unmasking of the over-glorification of conditioned motherhood, rape and violence against women during the Qabaili invasion, lack of acceptance of female political leaders in Kashmir, protest against the girl child's education and a mad desire for a male child. Despite Maqsood's progressiveness, his wife Fatima is desperate for the male child because the taunts of the society coerced her to suspect: "was her womb cursed to carry only daughters? (16). Hence Ali's birth makes her ecstatic but later on he becomes the cause of the death of Ayesha and the destruction of the whole family as he becomes a terrorist.

The first part is commendable for its subtle and incisive portrayal of the eclectic nature of the incest taboo and infantile sexuality. Ali as a child sleeps with his elder sister Ayesha and feels sexually attracted towards her. The whole issue is narrated through the imagery of a *jimn*, who in Ali's mind, is an epitome of all evils: "Ali began to find a tentative intimacy in the moulds of Ayesha's gentle curves....One night Ali had a dream: a Jinn was opening the drawstring of his pyjamas. When he instinctively reached down, his hand brushed against warm flesh and he awoke with a start, his heart racing.

'What is it?' Ayesha whispered.
'A jinn. He was opening my pyjamas'
'Shh. Go to sleep.lt was just a nightmare'''(123).

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This causes a mental conflict in him and he starts loathing her and blames her for his mental inflictions, a typical stereotypical patriarchal reaction. When finally Ayesha falls in love with a Hindu boy Deepak, Ali tells it to his father and becomes consequently the reason for Ayesha's forceful marriage and suicide. Thus, Ali becomes the potent symbol of patriarchy which first subjugates women (Ayesha) and then marginalizes Pundits. However, despite a chauvinistic setting, the novel exhibits certain overtly feminist characters, such as Jamila Maqsood's sister who flouts the oppressing Muslim conventions and goes for higher studies to America where she marries an American and deconstructs all patriarchal suppressions. Another such character is a cigarette-puffing midwife, Bhabi, who lives all alone without a whimper of dissatisfaction. The first part ends with the death of Ayesha.

There is a sudden transition from the first part to the second and this breaks the flow of the narrative. Despite the interconnectedness of both the sections, they can be read as separate novels. The second part is the evolution of Ali from a bright young student to a misguided Jihadi. The sensitive issues of autonomy of Kashmir, the funding by Pakistan to different terrorist groups, the brutality of the Indian Police, the animosity between different Jihadi groups (J.K.L.F, Hizbul Muzahuddin, etc), the cunning motives of both the Hindu and Muslim politicians, the vulnerability of Kashmiri youths, the plights of Kashmiri Pundits and the myth surrounding utopian independent Kashmir have been handled with such objectivity as it discourages any passive consumption of pre-opinionated thoughts. The fusion, intersection, blending and overlapping of these issues have been illustrated by the author with clinical precision and this is the high point of the novel.

Although the narrative at times slips into a documentary mode and reads like a political clipping ,yet the incorporation of the actual incidents, such as Operation Blue Star, assassination of Indira Gandhi, ousting of Rajiv Gandhi, kidnapping of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's daughter Rubiya Sayeed etc. add an air of authenticity to the narrative and captures the attention of the reader. The novel ends with Ali's epiphanic moment when he realizes the true meaning of Jihad and could see through the malicious motives of Jihadis. In a moment of self-realization he utters "....If I was ever the Ali of Islam, because what I believe to be Jihad seems now to be simply my villainy" (320)

As far as the technique is concerned, the novel is soaked with unconventional imagery and popular Kashmiri myths like Jaladeo, the villain, Zooni, the epitome of female power, etc. The image of Jaladeo is present throughout the text and provides a concrete motif. In fact Ali's identity crisis

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is resolved through the myth of Jaladeo. He states: "Could it be that instead of being Ali, I am really the one-eyed Jinn, the Jaladeo that Jubi Didi recognized me to be so long ago?"(320)

Other remarkable features of the book are its lucidity and direct translation from the Hindi proverbs which lend a dexterous charm to the narrative. It is refreshingly free from any typographical mistakes. Despite being overtly didactic, it is a glowing tribute to the people who have laid down their lives for peace and non-violence. Overall it is a welcome addition to the growing body of insightful writing in English today.

Kuhu Chanana

Movements with the Cosmic Dancer: On Pilgrimage to Kailash Manasarovar by Lakshmi Bandlamudi, New Delhi, New Age Books, 2006, Paperback, Pp. 219, Rs.295.

The record of a pilgrimage or the pilgrim's progress must be among the oldest genres of writing. Such accounts are essentially different from travel narratives in both scheme and perspective. Whereas the traveller covers physical space eagerly in a spirit of adventure, the pilgrim's physical movement runs parallel to the spiritual one, with the distances traversed outward reflecting the meditative journey inward. Whereas the touristic gaze of the curious traveller may or may not invest the landscape with special meaning, every aspect of the landscape through which the pilgrim passes is regarded as sacred and the temporal is subsumed by the spatial. Finally, the destination for the traveller offers shelter for the body; for the pilgrim, it represents salvation for the soul.

A pilgrimage is undertaken when the ineffable longings of the human soul to experience the divine urges its quest for fulfillment. Then, no path seems too difficult and no obstacle insurmountable. And if it is the call of the most sacred of all mountains, Kailash of the Himalayas, then the determination of the spirit rules over all considerations regarding danger or creature comforts.

When Lakshmi Bandlamudi, Professor of Psychology at the City University of New York, heard the call of the holy mountain in her heart, she started preparing herself physically, mentally and emotionally to undertake the extremely challenging, arduous and difficult pilgrimage. Categorized

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by the publishers as 'Travelogue/Mythology', the account of her journey actually transcends the generic description to symbolize a spiritual quest. The title derives from the powerful image of Shiva as Nataraja, the Supreme Dancer as the nodal cosmic force that drives the kinetic universe. The thirteen chapters of the book elaborate every phase of her journey towards the final vision of her cherished goal. No impersonal travelogue this; Bandlamudi writes in the Preface that "These are the movements of an ordinary pilgrim to an extraordinary place on earth. I invite the readers to move back and forth from one plane to another—the physical, spiritual, mythical, philosophical, historical and finally personal" (xiii). Indeed, all these strands are woven inextricably together in a fascinating weave. It is not just a record of private experiences that sometimes touch upon the mystical, interspersed with an effusion of reverential hymns; it recounts sthalapurana or the myths, legends and history associated with the places; alludes to philosophical exegeses of Shankara, Abhinavagupta and Sri Aurobindo; describes the astounding geography of the Tibetan Plateau and the awesome and breathtaking beauty of the Himalayas; and provides practical details about the travel.

The Abode of Snow or the Himalaya possesses irresistible fascination. Central to the cosmology and origin myths of four religions-Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and the pre-Buddha indigenous religion of Tibet - the mountains are eulogized in ancient texts. One of its peaks, a great mass of black rock soaring over 22,000 feet, is Mt Kailash, the sacred site for four religions and one of the world's most venerated places. On Kailash, the Hindus believe, sits Shiva in a state of perpetual meditation, generating the spiritual force that sustains the cosmos. The Jains call the mountain Astapada where Rishaba, the first Tirthankara attained salvation. Tibetans call Kailash 'Kang Rampoche' or the Precious Jewel of the Glacial Snow, the dwelling place of Demchog or Chakrasamvara and his consort Dorje Phagmo. Buddha is believed to have magically visited Kailash and the three hills around it are said to be the home of the Bodhisattvas Manjusri, Vajrapani, Avalokiteswara. For the Bonpos, the followers of Tibet's pre-Buddhist religion, it is Tise, the seat of the Sky Goddess Sipaimen, where a legendary battle took place between the Buddhist sage Milarepa and the Bonpo Naro Bon-chung. The latter's defeat displaced Bon as the primary religion of Tibet and established Buddhism.

Bandlamudi explains that the cosmologies and origin myths of each of these religions speak of Kailash as the mythical Mt. Meru or the Axis Mundi, the centre and birth place of the entire world. Kailash is seen by no more than a few hundred pilgrims each year. Its remote location in far western Tibet, in inhospitable and rugged terrain, requires weeks of difficult, often dangerous travel. The rarified air makes breathing difficult and can

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cause nausea and discomfort which might even turn fatal; the weather, always cold, can unexpectedly become treacherous, and halt or stop further travel; sturdy vehicles, which nevertheless break down, are needed to cross the grim landscape of the plateau; the pilgrims are expected to walk or ride yaks if required and carry all the supplies they might need for the entire journey—all this make the Kailash-Manasarovar pilgrimage a formidable and intimidating proposition.

Yet, as Bandlamudi emphasizes, the first sight of Kailash is so overwhelming and rewarding that one promptly forgets the sufferings of the journey. She expresses fervent gratitude for having been accorded a clear vision of the holy symbol. "A perfect tetrahedron, smoothly covered with snow...the mountain forehead chipped in three horizontal lines...of Vibhuti' (125-6) gleams in the bright mid-morning sunlight against a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds embracing it. It appears splendid in its isolation with no other peaks surrounding it, radiant as a jewel offset by the ring of dark rock. She is amazed by its symmetry, the north side being a mirror image of the south, the east and west, except for the vertical clefts that mark the south face. The entire site is like a huge temple, with Darchen or the Flagstaff positioned in front, an elephant shaped rock as Ganesha and another like a hump of a bull, Nandi, to be passed before approaching the Sublime Lord. She is also amazed that the path circling the mountain forms a perfect mandala. To her great delight, Kailash presents itself in different moods: brilliant Hemadri in the golden sunlight and shimmering Rajatadri in the moonlight. Overcome by emotion, Bandlamudi surrenders herself totally to the ecstasy of being face to face with her deity and sings the glory of Shiva, the Supreme Ascetic.

The pilgrims undertake Kora or Parikrama, a thirty-two mile circumambulation around the mountain. Bandlamudi notes the peculiar experience that one undergoes at different stages of the difficult climb and descent. Near the Dolma La pass, one seems to pass through the gates of death itself: "In this stretch, presided by Yama every gasp of breath that I took seemed to be a gift from above" (163-4). She records surreal experiences: "my body and mind experienced unknown dangers, unknown challenges and unknown fears" (179). Along the way are natural elements that stir spiritual feelings, like glaciers, giant footprints on rock, Shiv Stal, Gauri Kund or Tukje Chenpo Tso, the Lake of Great Mercy, and a huge hanging rock called the Axe of Karma.

To the south of Mount Kailash lie two great lakes. The eastern lake, Manasarovar or the Lake of Consciousness, at an altitude of 15000 ft is the highest body of fresh water in the world. Shaped like the sun, with a total area of 320 square km and depth of 90m, it matches the height of the mountain. Reverently called Mapham Tso or the Precious Lake, it is

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believed that at its centre grows the magical Tree of Life that marks the navel of Jambudvipa. When the tree's fruit ripens into gold, it drops into the lake, transmuting the waters into an elixir of immortality. Upon the lake in the form of golden swans dwell Shiva and his consort Parvati.

Bandlamudi writes, "Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar complement each other in every aspect—the height to its depth, the spirit to its matter, the erotic to the sublime and the immutable to the mutable. Kailash is the all pervading transcendental God – the *Paramatma*, while the Lake is the living being – the *Jivatma*, who must find the personal God in the depth of the soul. Like the clear waters of Manasarovar capable of reflecting the Centre of Divinity, the mind must also be clear and become a symbol of fecundity."

Separated by a narrow isthmus is the western crescent shaped lake of still waters, the Rakshas Tal or Lake of the Demons. The water of the lake is never drunk as it is considered inauspicious. Strangely there are no birds at this lake, though birds of different kinds, especially golden brahmani ducks, flock the shores of Manasarovar and shoals of fish are visible among the silt and colourful stones of the glimmering lakebed. Rakshas Tal presents the converse of Manas, as darkness does to light. The Tibetans rejoice when the eddying waves of Manas overflow the isthmus to enter the Rakshas Tal. Four great rivers rise from the area to flow in different directions: Indus to the north, Karnali to the south, Yarlung Tsangpo to the east and Sutlej to the west.

Bandlamudi believes that a pilgrimage to Kailash and the two magical lakes is a life-changing experience. She surrenders herself to every passing moment. Her responses to situations, reflections on philosophy - finding cognate truths in Indian and western views of life, her spiritual meditations - all constitute a process of reflexivity and introspection. She returns from the majestic isolation of the Himalayas to the strife-torn world and contemplates the enduring lessons of the pilgrimage. She wonders what makes a true pilgrimage—is it a desire for excitement and diversion or does it lead to a transformation of a radical and lasting kind? How do the heights of emotions adjust to the mundane realities of life, as they must? For the restless spirit in search of the eternal, a pilgrimage begins long before the actual physical journey commences; it must therefore continue after the destination is reached. After the pilgrim returns bearing serenity within, the panorama of the outward landscape unveils unknown dimensions. Having discovered the essence of peace, frenetic wanderings cease and life is embraced, not rejected.

There would certainly be many accounts of pilgrimage to the Himalayas and Kailash-Manasarovar. What distinguishes Bandlamudi's record is her use of the narrative form to universalize a personal spiritual quest. In his book

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Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (1986), Bruner had proposed that there are two ways of knowing: a narrative way of looking at the world in a holistic manner, making sense of events and phenomena by creating a story; and a paradigmatic way that is logical, rational, based on analysis. For a psychologist like Bandlamudi, cognitive analysis would be a familiar mode; yet she chooses a narrative form because she realizes that supra-logical experiences of the inexpressible kind are best organized through the process of narrativising into sequential and relational patterns. Figurations of language and structure help to represent atmosphere, feelings, and motivations and conceptualize the relationship of the self with the world and its reality. Thus myth, philosophy, history and travel are woven together and the power of mantra is invoked through prayers and songs to create a sense of deeper meaning. As for the reader, one could choose to remain at the outer layer of the exotic travel, enjoy the narrative truth, or probe the responses of the evolving self which is the structuring principle of the narrative.

There is a quality of quietude in Bandlamudi's writing. Her language has poetic suppleness and her tone, an easy intimacy — of an ardent devotee among sahridayas. Supplemented by wonderful photographs, translation of rare texts, a select bibliography, the result is a rich fare of the unputdownable kind.

Tutun Mukherjee

Parashuram: Selected Stories, translated by Sukanta Chaudhuri and Palash Baran Pal, Penguin Books, 2006, Pp. 322, Rs.295

> 'Everyone wants wealth, but wealth can only go to a person fit to receive it. That's where Jesus and I disagreed. Jesus used to say a rich man could never enter heaven. But I'd say, why not, if he uses his wealth to good purpose? Poor fellow, lost his life quite calamitously.'

> 'Excuse me, Master,' said Mr Sen in astonishment. 'Did you know Jesus Christ?' Birinchi. 'Ha, ha - why, he was born just the other day!'

Call it imaginative exuberance or plain drivel addressed to gullible boneheads, it is Birinchi Baba's way of impressing the people grovelling to him for his prized blessings to solve their myriad problems. Supposed to command

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the past, present and future happenings, he is said to have transported one Mekiram Agarwala to 1914 for three days just before the War and enabled him to earn 15 lakhs. Interestingly, 'Meki' in Bengali means false or fraudulent. The name is thus significant in the context. Projected as a god-man by his henchmen in the eponymous story in the book under review, Birinchi Baba remains one of the unforgettable characters created by Parashuram. With his penchant for exposing the hypocrisy and corruption in our society, his comic tales are centered on the hard core of realism and narrated or presented in vignettes with telling effect though the milieu is somewhat dated. It is almost a case of fiction reinforcing the fact without being preachy.

The story reminds me of the 'memoscan', a device allowing the past to be experienced as the present invented by Boman Desai's hero Homi Seervai having the same function as the telepathy with which Rushdie credits Saleem. But Rajsekhar Bose, writing the stories in a lighter vein under the pseudonym Parashuram, did not have to resort to any such mechanism. He deftly drew up a satiric portrait of the known social type, not without the thrills and spills that go with it, and worked through an ingeniously constructed plot enlivened with his inimitable characterization and sedulous

attention to every detail of speech, dress, custom and conduct.

The book under review includes a number of his humorous stories considered to be classics, culled from the earlier volumes and also the later works. While some of the stories are bitingly satiric the others concentrate more on human folly and idiosyncrasies by playing up the funny side of life. Juxtaposed with "Birinchi Baba", the fraudster posing as god-man, is 'Shri Shri Siddheshwari Limited' delving into the psyche of the fraudulent company promoter. But while Birinchi Baba is exposed and expelled, the

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A hilarious situation develops in "A Medical Crisis" where a man accidentally caught his foot in the folds of his dhoti while trying to jump off a moving tramcar and fell on the road. As the tram grated to a halt his co-passengers insisted that he was badly hurt though he knew and asserted that nothing had actually happened to him. Not to lag behind were his friends and well-wishers nearer home. They too would not leave him alone and egged him on to consult medical advice for proper diagnosis and treatment. The physician he consulted first said gravely that his was a suspected case of a 'cerebral tumour with strangulated ganglia'. Then followed in turns a homoeopath, an ayurveda practitioner, a 'hakim' and ultimately a lady doctor who lost no time in declaring that there was nothing wrong with him except that he badly needed a guardian and married him. She happened to be Bipula Mallik, the name matching her rotund figure; the word 'Bipula', in Bengali means large or corpulent.

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It is not here a case of a hypochondriac, making a mountain of a mole-hill but the presumption of a malady where there is none. The nuances of the subjective states, blurring the borderline between deception and selfdeception, have been presented comically through a host of characters moulding the mind of the meek protagonist It is, moreover, a veiled lampoon of the exaggerated claims of the various systems of medicine and the distressing consequences of the misplaced sympathies of the socalled well-wishers.

Some of the stories evoke images of Moliere's plays particularly, Tartuffe and Le Malade imaginaire, which are self-contained comic structures satirizing the inveterate proclivities in seventeenth century France. Have you ever heard of a marriage hall being fixed and a wedding party planned without a bride in sight? Yes this is what exactly happened in "The League of Tender Spirits." The characters in this bizarre story are supposed to gather in "Moonshine Villa", again a name which is highly suggestive. Parashuram opted for a series of vignettes instead of a conventional narrative form in "The Scripture Read Backwards."

But the craft of conceptualizing and executing a plot can be seen at its best in "On Bhushandi's Plain," a romantic farce extending over three generations and exploiting the belief in supernatural elements. Rabindranath Tagore said, "He creates image after image in such a way that I felt I had known them forever. Even the ghosts on Bhushandi's plain seemed always to have been familiar." The stories collectively reveal the changing facets of the social norms in Bengal. Events get complicated and almost go out of hand in "The Magic Stone". Both this story, that is "Parash Pathar" in Bengali and "Birinchi Baba" have become celluloid masterpieces in the hands of the maestro Satyajit Ray.

Though professionally a scientist and industrial executive, Rajsekhar Bose created a niche for himself in Bengali literature. Why he opted for the mythical 'Parashuram' as his pseudonym is somewhat a mystery. Perhaps he wanted to use the satiric thrusts as his weapon. Kudos to the translators for a competent English rendition while retaining the verve, flavour and nuances of the original. It is, no doubt, a mind-boggling task with a profusion of words and phrases used in the local parlance. The explanatory footnotes are a valuable aid to those not acquainted with the Bengali language, colloquial expressions and customs. Jatindrakumar Sen's illustrations in black-and-white drawings and simple sketches help a great deal in visualizing the characters and the ambience. All in all, this handy volume encases story-telling at its liveliest.

M.N. Chatterjee

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Amirdham-Suryaa: Tamil poet and critic; has two collections of poetry and one collection of essays to his credit; writing regularly for various literary magazines of repute.

Azhagiyasinger: Tamil poet and short-story writer; has two collections of poetry and two collections of short stories to his credit; brings out a Tamil literary quarterly called Naveena Virutcham.

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Bandyopadhyay, Tapan (b. 1947): Reputed Bengali fiction-writer and poet; recipient of Bankim Puraksar, the highest literary award in fiction category from West Bengal Government, for his novel *Nadi-Mati-Aranya* and Bengal Film Journalists' Award for the best story for the film *Mahul Banir Sereng*, a civil servant by pro-

fession; currently posted as Director, Culture, Government of West Bengal. Add: 16/2 Kalicharan Dutta Road, Kolkata 700 061.

Bhattacharjee, Chandra (b.1961): Freelance artist; studied at Indian College of Art & Draughtsman-ship, Kolkata; stays and works at Kolkata.

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Chakravarty, Swapnamay (b. 1952): Reputed Bengali fictionist; his first collection of story *Bhumisutra* (1982) immediately established him as a fresh and strong voice; has published 10 volumes of short stories and six novels so far; visited Germany on

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennal and eGangotri invitation from Sahitya Akademi and Puraskar etc.: his stori Max Mueller Bhavan during the Frankfurt Book Fair, 2006; works as a Programme Executive with the All India Radio.

Chanana, Kuhu: Critic; has one work, D.H. Lawrence And the Poetic Novel besides articles and reviews in journals like Book Reiven, Points of View etc.; teaches English Literature at Shradhanand College, Alipur, New Delhi. Add: D-23, IInd Floor, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi 110 024.

Chanda, Ipshita (b. 1961): Teaches Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata; has translated two of Mahasweta Devi's works from Bengali into English, published by Seagull, Kolkata: Bitter Soil (short story collection, 1998) and The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh (novel, 2003); has also published English translation of two plays by Sukumar Ray with introduction from Sahitya Akademi (2004). Add: M 5/15 Teachers' Quarters, Jadavpur University Campus, Kolkata 700 032.

Chatterjee, M.N.: Critic and reviewer. Add: 202 Jaijaiwanti, Asiatic Enclave, Vartak Nagar, Thane (W) 400 606, Maharashtra.

Chattopadhyay, Jhareshwar (b. 1948): Bengali fiction-writer; has more than 10 published works which include short-story collections and novels; recipient of Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay Puraskar, Tarasankar

Puraskar etc.; his stories have been translated into Hindi and Malayalam also. Add: Water Tank Para, P.O. Diamond Harbour, 24 Parganas (South) Dist., West Bengal.

Chaudhuri, Santanu Sinha: Writer and translator; translates from Bengali to English; has four published works to his credit; presently working as a trainer in business communication. Add: P-398, Parnasree, Lake Palace, C-4, Kolkata 700 060

Choudhury, Amitabha (b.1962): Young Bengali poet and fictionist; has five anthologies of poetry besides a collection of short stories and two novels to his credit; has made silent inroads into the English poetry with his maiden venture, The Sky Herald; a teacher by profession, he also edits the literary pages of a Bengali daily published from Silchar, Assam.

Chowdhury, Indira: Professor of English at Jadavpur University, Kolkata; is the author of The Frail Hero and Virile History, which got her Rabindra Puraskar in 2000; is the compiler of the Supplement of Indian English words published in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary in 1995; has published English translation of Ashapura Devi's novel Pratham Pratisruti under the title The First Promise.

Choudhury, Kallol: Poet and shortstory writer in Bengali and English; also 1 glish storie the S has b publ Press to hi Ashr 788

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also translates from Bengali to English and vice versa; one of his short stories, "Where the Sun Rises when the Shadows Fall on the Northeast" has been included in a book jointly published by Oxford University Press and I.I.C; has so far four books to his credit. Add: 'Karuna Nilay', Ashram Road, PO & Dt. Hailakandi 788 151, Assam.

Das, Jyotirmoy (b. 1940): Bengali poet, essayist and translator; has more than eight published works to his credit; is one of the founder editors of a well known Bengali magazine *Indraprastha*; recipient of Bihar Bangla Academy Award, awarded by Nikhil Bharat Banga Sahitya Sammelan. Add: 50, Kantapukur 3rd Bye Lane, Kadamitala, Howrah 711 101.

Dasgupta, Sanjukta (b. 1953): Indian English poet, critic and translator; has so far published three collections of poetry; recipient of Fulbright Scholarship for 1999-2000; teaches English Literature at Calcutta University. Add: 7C Cornfields Road, Calcutta 700 019.

Datta, Ketaki: Translator and critic in English; working as Sr. Lecturer in English, A.B.N. Seal (Govt.) College, Cooch Behar. Add: Hitendra N. Bylane (Next to NCC Offices), Coochbehar 736101, West Bengal.

Deb, Upal: Teaches English at Bongaigaon College, Assam; has edited a volume on Vijay Tendulkar's Ghasiram Kotwal; his articles have appeared in The Hindu, The Times of India, The Statesman etc.

Dev, Amiya: Eminent scholar and critic writing in English and Bengali; one of the founders of the Comparative Literature Department of Jadavpur University, Kolkata; retired as the Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University, West Bengal. Add: EE-108, Salt Lake, Flat No. 7, Kolkata 700 091.

Dev Sen, Nabaneeta (b. 1938): Eminent Bengali fiction writer and poet; has more than 35 published works to her credit which includes, besides poetry and fiction, bellesletters and travelogues; recipient of several awards and honours, which includes-Mahadevi Verma Award, Celli Award from Rockefeller Foundation, Sarat Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Graduate Fellowship in Comparative Literature from Indiana University, Fellowship from Royal Asiatic Soceity of Great Britian and Ireland etc. Add: 'Bhalobasa' 72, Hindustan Park, Calcutta 270 029.

Dutta, Ajit (1907-1979): Was one of the five major Bengali poets of the thirties, born and brought up in Dhaka (present capital of Bangladesh), he migrated to Kolkata after obtaining his Master's degree and taught Bengali in Jadavpur University since its inception in 1956; his first collection of poetry Kusumer

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Mas, published in 1930, immediately established his reputation as a poet; was closely associatred with the avantgarde magazine Kallol and Kavita; has left behind 10 volumes of poetry and five collections of personal essays.

Dutta, Kumar Ajit (b.1950): Bengali poet and fiction-writer; has six published works to his credit; also edited, *Uttarpurbanchaler Bangla Kavita*, an anthology of Bengali poetry of North East region. Add: F-4, Madhab Sankar Housing Complex, Pandav Nagar, Pandu, Guwahati 781 012.

Dutt, Harsha (b. 1955): Distinguished Bengali fiction-writer; has written one hundred short stories and 12 novels so far; recipient of Samaresh Basu Award; at present he is working as Assistant Editor of the Bengali fortnightly *Desh*.

Dyson, Ketaki Kushari (b.1940): Reputed poet, novelsit and critic in both Bengali and English; a doctorate from Oxford University; her output ranges from poetry and fiction to essays, reviews, literary translations and academic work; has authored more than 13 books both in Bengali and English; recipient of Prafullakumar Sarkar Memorial Ananda Award, Bhubanmohini Dasi Medal of the University of Calcutta for her contribution to contemporary Bengali writing; was Writer-in-Residence at the London Borough

of Redbridge Educational Services. Add: 63, Banburry Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX 51, AH.

Kadarkarai: Tamil poet, short-story writer and journalist; has two collections of poems to his credit.

Kar, Bimal (b. 1921): Eminent Bengali fiction-writer; has more than 50 published works, which includes, Barafsaheber Meye (short stories), Kharkuto, Grahan, Purna Apurna (novels), Ghughu (play) etc. to his credit; his novels, Kharkuto and Balika Badhu have been made into films; recipient of Ananda Puraskar, Sahitya Akademi Award, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay Award etc. Address of legal heir: CE-137, Salt Lake, Calcutta 700 064.

Karan, Sudhir Kumar: Bengali fiction-writer, poet and essayist; has around thirty published works to his credit; has compiled the most authentic dictionary of the language of South Western Bengal in association with Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. Add: 3D Uttara, 13 Broad Street, Kolkata 700 019.

Kalyan Majumdar (b.1943): A regular contributor to renowned magazines and dalilies like *Ananda bazar*, *Desh, krittibas* and more, for the last 30 years; his first collection of short stories was published in 1982; has till date five books to his credit.

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Kohli, Suresh (b.1947): Poet, literary critic and documentary filmmaker. Has published four collections of poetry, one novel and edited several volumes of essays and short stories. Has translated extensively from Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. Edited and published *The Indian Literary Review* from 1979 to 1990. Add: E-180, Greater Kailash Part II, New Delhi 110 048.

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Madhav, Harshdev (b. 1954): Well-known modern Sanskrit poet; also writes in Gujarati; has more than 35 published works both in Sanskrit and Gujarati to his credit; recipient of Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award, Sanskrit Sahitya Akademi Award etc. Add: A-12, Hira Moti Tenements, Opp. Gulab Soap Factory, Near Siddhi Complex, Chandkheda 382 424.

Kalyan Majumdar (b.1943): A regular contributor to renowned magazines and dalilies like *Ananda bazar*, *Desh, krittibas* and more, for the last 30 years; his first collection of short stories was published in 1982; has till date five books to his credit.

Majumdar, Subha Prasad Nandi (b.1962): teaches mathematics in Cachar College, Silchar, Assam; a renowned cultural activist and noted singer of north-east India; has an active association with IPTA and various peoples' movements; is an occasional contributor to various Bengali little magazines and news

dailies besides being on the editorial board of the Bengali weekly *Ishaaner Dinkaal*.

Mitra, Manoj (b. 1938): Eminent Bengali playwright; has more than 60 published plays to his credit; ;has written, directed plays and serials for radio and TV; some of his plays have been translated into Hindi and other languages; recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, W.B. Govt. Award (Twice) etc. Add: AG-35, Salt Lake City, Calcutta 700 091.

Mukherjee, Tutun: Scholar critic and translator in English; her translation of Banaphool's short stories from Bengali into English has been very well received; currently Professor and Head, Department of English, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad 500 046.

Nagvenkar, Mayabhushan: Sanskrit poet. Add: M-209, Greater Kailash – II, New Delhi 110 048.

Palit, Dibyendu (b.1939): Bengali novelist, short-story writer, poet, journalist, and film and drama critic; his published works include 42 novels, 25 collections of short stories, nine collections of poems and four volumes of essays; recipient of Ananda Puraskar, Ramkumar Bhuwalka Award, Bankim Chandra Memorial Award and Sahitya Akademi Award. Add: Flat 7F-2, Meghamallar, 18/3 Gariahat Road, Kolkata 700 019.

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Pandey, Jhumur: Bengali short-story writer and poet; has three collections of short stories, Geram Thaner Manushta O Dulia, Sapna Gandhar Khonje etc and one collection of poetry to her credit; recipient of Ek Sathe Silver Jubilee Award for her short stories; one of her short stories has been made into a film and telecast by Silchar Doordarshan. Add: C/o Sri Dipak Nair, R.R. Shome Road, Silchar, Dt. Cachar, Assam.

Pazhanivel (b. 1975): Tamil poet; has published one collection of poems, *Thavalai-Veedu*.

Pooma Eswaramurthy: Tamil poet and short-story writer; has three collections of poetry and one collection of short stories and a number of literary articles to his credit.

Raha, Shuma: A journalist by profession and a freelance writer; translates from Bengali to English; has worked as journalist with the *Telegraph* newspaper for eight years; presently she is translating Bonophool's *Haate Bajare* for Sahitya Akademi; Add: 58 A Ritchie Road, Prova Apartments, Calcutta 700 019.

Ramakrishnan, Latha (Rishi): Tamil poet and short-story writer; translates poetry from Tamil to English and vice versa; has four collections of poems, two collections of short stories, one collection of essays and more than ten translated works to her credit. Add: No.57, Gautham Apartments, C, Ground Floor, Mosque St., Saidhapet, Chennai 600 015, Tamil Nadu.

Rao, S.S. Prabhakar: A scholar and translator from Telugu to English; has published six anthologies of translations of Telugu poetry, besides his magnum opus *Post Independence Telugu Poetry*; is presently on the faculty of English in ICFAI. Add: 64, Om Nagar, Langar House, Hyderabad 500 008.

Ray, Anil Kumar: A bilingual poet, critic and translator; has published three books of poems (one in Bengali translation) and edited an anthology of Indo-English Poetry; Add: 76 F/1, Jawpur Road, Kolkata 700 074.

Rej, Asim Kumar (b.1946): Bengali poet, short-story writer, broadcaster, and journalist; has published six works collections both poetry and short stories; honoured by Indian Institute of Mass Communication. Add: Flat – A, Manasa Apartment, DC/ 7A, Shastribagan, Deshbandhunagar, Kolkata 700 059.

Sabitha, T.P.: Teaches English Literature in Hansraj College, Delhi University; has written and presented papers on translation, English pedagogy in India, early women's journals in Malayalam and visual culture; writes poetry in English and Malayalam.

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short-story writer; has three collections of poetry, one collection of short stories and one collection of essays to her credit.

Satpathy, Sumanyu (b.1952): Critic in English; has published one book on criticism, Re-viewing Reviewing and several research articles and essays in Indian and international journals; serving as Professor of English in Delhi University. Add: No.8171, D-8, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110 070.

Sen, Paritosh (b.1918): Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh; studied at Government School of Art and Craft, Madras and Andre Lhote's School, Academy Grand Chaumier, Ecole des Beaux Arts, Ecole de Louvre, Paris; lives and works in Kolkata

Sibich-Chelvan: Tamil poet; also translates from English to Tamil; has two collections of poetry to his credit;

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'Sathara' Maalathy: Tarriil poet and presently he is on the Editorial Section of a literary magazine called Pudhu Ezhuthu.

> Sornabharathi: Tamil poet; has one collection of poems, Manavelialavu to his credit; also bringing out a literary monthly called, Kalvettu Pesugiradhu.

> Talukdar, Sumit (b. 1968): Freelance journalist by profession; recipient of Michael Madhusudan award. Add: 58, Shyam Road, P.O. Naihati, Dist. North 24 Parganas, West Bengal 743 165.

Thamizh Manavaalan: Tamil poet; has two poetry collections to his credit; his poems have appeared in the leading literary magazines of Tamilnad.

Tilokani, Mukesh: Sindhi poet and artist. Add: 41, Sindhu Varsha Society, Adipur (Kutch) 370 205.



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